Emerging from COVID-19: The 2022 Report of Finance and Access Issues

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This year marks the 20th year of our National Access and Finance Survey (NAFS) studies of access and funding issues in public higher education. Over the last 20 years of this survey, we've received an average of 46 responses that typically ranges from 40 to 50 each year conducted. The survey has seen consistently great cooperation among our evolving staff and respondents, and we thank all 50 National Council of State Directors of Community Colleges (NCSDCC) members, and countless other staff across the nation, for participating again between July 12 and August 31, 2022, we also thank our advisory panel for survey input. We survey NCSDCC members because of their broad knowledge of access and finance issues across education sectors and state government as well. For 2022, our first after the COVID pandemic, survey respondents could respond online or by paper. We offer two important caveats: first, differences exist in funding, assigned state missions, and organization of community colleges, and they are greater at community colleges than at public higher education's other two sectors: flagship and regional universities. Second, since most NAFS items are on a Likert scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree, results are *perceptions*.

Our two main research questions for looking across the current and past surveys are, first, what are current budget drivers, and how does that fit with what we have seen in the past?, and second, based on past and current responses, what are expected trends for the future? Details on survey collection and methods can be found in the introduction to this volume.

WHY SURVEY STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS?

For millions of academically-talented, low-income, first-generation, and minority students, community colleges are the portal of entry to higher education and the

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American Dream. They offer developmental education for underprepared high school graduates, non-graduates, and older workers with antiquated skills. Their dual enrollment, developmental education programs, technical programs for the workforce (often in tandem with secondary schools) and transfer offerings put community colleges in the middle ground between secondary education and upper division public flagship and regional universities, and private colleges.

The sources of revenue are highly varied *within* the community college sector, a reality rarely acknowledged by policymakers and scholars. The revenue mix is much more consistent across state lines for our nation's 439 public Regional Universities and 107 public Flagship Universities than at our 951 public Community Colleges that are in the Mission-Driven Classification (MDC). Only community colleges among the three sectors receives local tax revenues. A 2008 Illinois State University *Grapevine* study found local tax support for community colleges comprised 10 percent or more of total revenues in 25 states, while in many of the remaining 25 states, such as Florida, Georgia, and Indiana, local support approaches zero.

These stark variations in community college revenue patterns across state lines are based upon the differing philosophies behind the state enabling laws passed between World War II and the end of the "baby boom" in the mid-1970s. They have profound policy implications today.

One author of this article remembers interviewing the system president of a large multi-campus Texas urban community college district in 2001, as the Lone Star State began its "Closing the Gaps" initiative. One of its four key policy goals was to enroll a million more students between 2000 and 2015. "The 13^{th} and 14^{th} year will be financed by local taxpayer, and not the state," this system CEO flatly predicted, a prediction that has come true.

By 2013-14, the 157 U.S. community colleges received 15 percent or less of their total revenues from state funds, and 57 received five percent or less from their states, including Joliet in Illinois, the nation's first junior college. By 2016, local support as a percentage of total revenue exceeded 10 percent in just 16 states, down from the 25 reported by *Grapevine* in 2006. As policymakers ponder national policies for community college funding, such as free tuition for example, careful consideration to these dramatic differences across state lines is necessary.

These funding differences impact all aspects of what federal, state, and local policy leaders expect community colleges to be able to do. Consider the workforce development mission community colleges are expected to play—a mission business leaders often assume is well-funded because of the prominence of high-visibility federal Workforce Investment Opportunity Act funds. A dirty little secret about community college financing is that to fund technology-rich curricula requires large enrollments in low-cost general education curricula. Curricula in high demand areas such as computer numerical control (CNC), allied health and nursing, automotive technology, aviation, and other high visibility programs are typically the most expensive at any community college. Their low class sizes, often required by external accrediting bodies, means that adding, retooling, or expanding these expensive programs requires colleges to internally reallocate funds from elsewhere. This is a daunting challenge when enrollments fall, as they did at community colleges for the five consecutive years starting in 2012 after Congress imposed Pell eligibility restrictions. Declining enrollments immediately translate into falling tuition and fee revenues. It is against this backdrop of complex interplay of issues that we begin our analysis of the 45 responses obtained from the 2022 National Access and Finance Survey.

FINDINGS FOR THE YEAR JUST CONCLUDED (FY2021-22)

Perhaps the most striking finding in this report are the very favorable current financial position of higher education, which we attribute to the presence of federal funds to backfill pandemic-related disruptions. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) of 2020, the American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021, and the CARES Act of 2022, together provided states funding to backfill disruptions caused by COVID-19. Taken together, these acts backfilled state budgets with federal funds to cover growing state matches for unemployment insurance and Medicaid, while also providing $14 billion under provisions of the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund in 2020.

The CARES Act of 2022 also gave states more flexibility to carryover funds from CARES I and ARPA. This eliminated the need for states to find funds for other program areas, especially Medicaid, or to balance their budgets by reducing public higher education appropriations for operating budgets (and looking away when tuition is raised). For the first time since NAFS began in 2003, state appropriations <u>exceeded</u> both percentage increases in tuition and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate.

In our presentation of data, we compare the year just ended, 2021-22 and predictions for the next year, 2022-23, to the years just after the Great Recession and especially 2013, when the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) ended. Our 2016 report revealed the most challenging period for community college operating budgets were not the three fiscal years when ARRA funding was in place—FY2009, FY2010, and FY2011—as ARRA's maintenance of effort provisions effectively prevented deep state cuts. Instead, the worst three-year period of state funding for community college operating budgets were FY2012, FY2013, and FY2014, when unemployment rates were high and state budget coffers strained. Does the post-COVID period resemble the period immediately after the Great Recession?

In the fiscal year just concluded, FY2021-22, just one state, Iowa, reported taking mid-year cuts in state appropriations for their community colleges and regional universities, with no cuts for their flagship universities. This was the lowest number of respondents reporting mid-year cuts since our surveys started in 2003. In FY2010-11 by contrast, even with federal ARRA funds available to backfill state matches to federal programs and protect education funding, 14 states still reported mid-year cuts in state appropriations for community colleges, 9 for public regional universities, and 10 for their public flagship universities. From two out of three respondents, mid-year cuts were reported in all three public higher education sectors (community colleges, regional, and flagship universities) in FY2008-09, and nearly 20 reported cuts in elementary and secondary education as well. Even in FY2012-13, well past the unemployment trough that reached 9.6 percent nationally in 2010 (14 states were above 10 percent), six of 50 respondents reported mid-year cuts at community colleges; four of 47 at public regional universities; and five of 48 at their public flagship universities, with average cuts of four, 3.6 percent, and 4.1 percent, respectively.

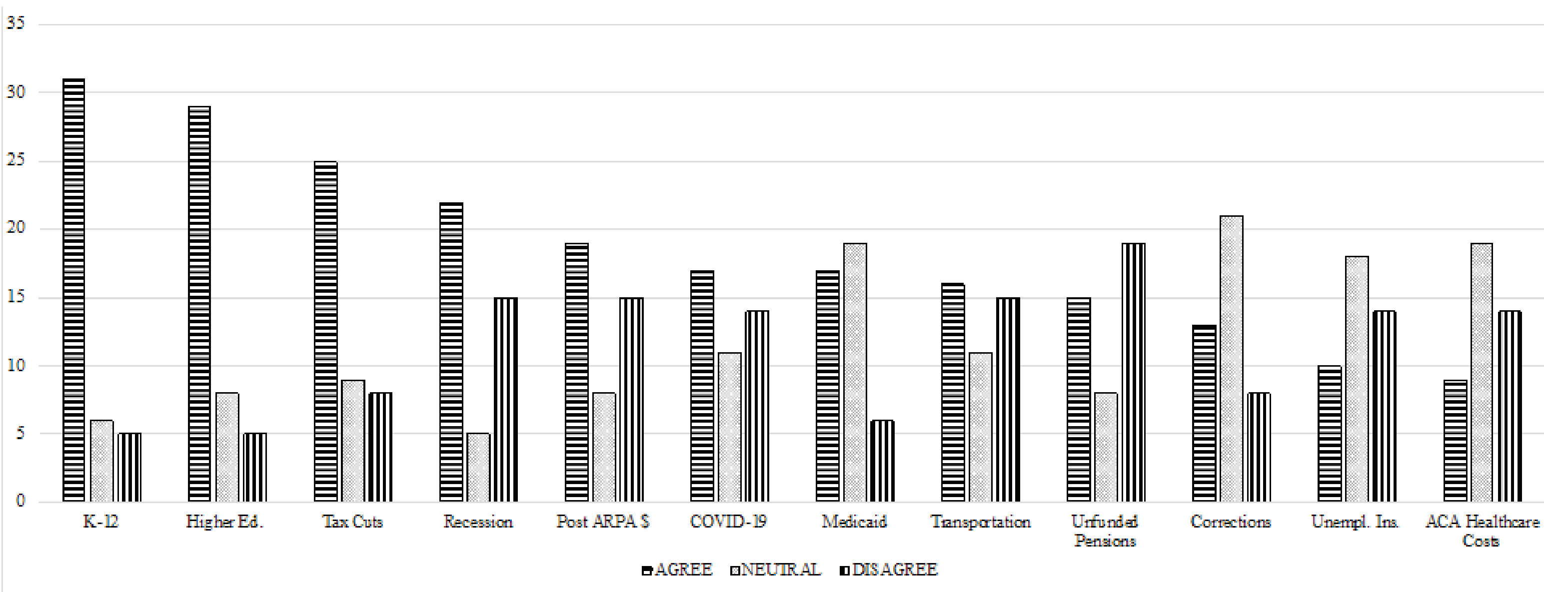
Key Budget Drivers

An important goal of our annual surveys is to compare how public higher education stacks up against other state priorities. Senior state-level postsecondary leaders are asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement about the influence of the following budget drivers in the most recently concluded legislative session: elementary and secondary education, higher education, Medicaid, corrections, recession, producing a decline in state revenue, unemployment insurance, and transportation/highways.

Given the dynamic nature of state budgeting, at the suggestion of our Advisory Panels we added the items "Tax Reductions/Local Property Tax Relief" starting in our 2008 survey, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) for 2009 to 2012, "Unfunded State Retiree Pension Obligations" (or Pensions) and "Health Care Cost Increases Tied to Federal Health Care Legislation" as of 2012. For this year, our Advisory Panel suggested adding "Public Health/COVID-19" and, with the end of American Rescue Plan Act funding, that item as well.

Figure 1 shows the key budget drivers in the Spring 2022 sessions of state legislatures, as reported by state community college leaders regarding the key budget drivers in next year's state budget for the legislative sessions just concluded (FY2021-22). Over the two decades of administration of these surveys, the item "Recession, producing a decline in state revenues" has always been the top budget driver during economic downturns, while in good economic years, "Elementary and Secondary Education" and "Medicaid" are

Figure 1: Top Budget Drivers in State Legislative Sessions in FY2021 through FY2022
(Among 10 Budget Drivers, Tax Cuts have never made the Top 3 before)



Source: National Survey of Finance and Access Issues, Education Policy Center, The University of Alabama, 2022

interchangeably ranked first or second (in bad years, Medicaid is often ranked ahead of Elementary and Secondary Education, due to the increase costs to the states of the match required by the federal government). In most years, we have observed a significant drop-off to the next set of budget items, which typically include Higher Education, Transportation, Pensions, and Corrections. Last year, as Figure 1 shows, among 43 respondents, Elementary and Secondary Education was ranked the top budget driver (32), which suggests last year was relatively good budgetarily, a point confirmed by the just one state reporting taking mid-year budget cuts.

Last year's budget session was unique, however, in that for the first time in twenty years of administering these surveys, "Higher Education Cost Increases" was ranked among the top three budget drivers (#2, 29 responses). Whereas, "Tax Reductions" was the third-ranked item (25 responses), and "Recession, producing a decline in state revenues" as fourth (23). "Uncertainties concerning ARPA funding" was ranked fifth (19), "Public Health/COVID-19" and "Medicaid" were tied for sixth (18), followed by "Transportation" at eighth (16) and "Unfunded State Pension Obligations" ninth at (15).

Another striking difference between 2022 and past years is the exceptionally low ranking of Medicaid—its lowest ranking over the twenty year time period of conducting these surveys. Normally, in a poor economic year, "Recession, producing a decline in state revenues" is top ranked, and if the year is relatively good economically, K-12 Education and Medicaid are interchangeably ranked either first or second. For the 2022 legislative sessions just concluded, both Higher Education and Tax Cuts entered the top three. This has never occurred before.

PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD (FY2022-23)

We turn now to an assessment of predicted changes (increases and decreases) for the next fiscal year, FY2022-23, for state tax appropriations and tuition across public higher education's three major sectors, as well as for state student financial aid. Policy alignment of appropriations, tuition and state student aid policies is assessed, as the necessary precondition for a "high tuition/high aid" model of student financial aid to work. This is followed by survey items on access and finance issues including facilities, capacity to serve students, and willingness to support public higher education, followed by "hot topics" suggested by our Advisory Panel.

When asked to respond to the survey item, "Community college enrollments in my state have recovered to pre-pandemic levels," among 42 respondents, just six were in agreement, three were neutral, while 33 were in disagreement, a strong majority. Respondents from just two states indicate "strongly agree," while four indicate “agree,” while 19 indicate “disagree” and 14 indicate “strongly disagree.”

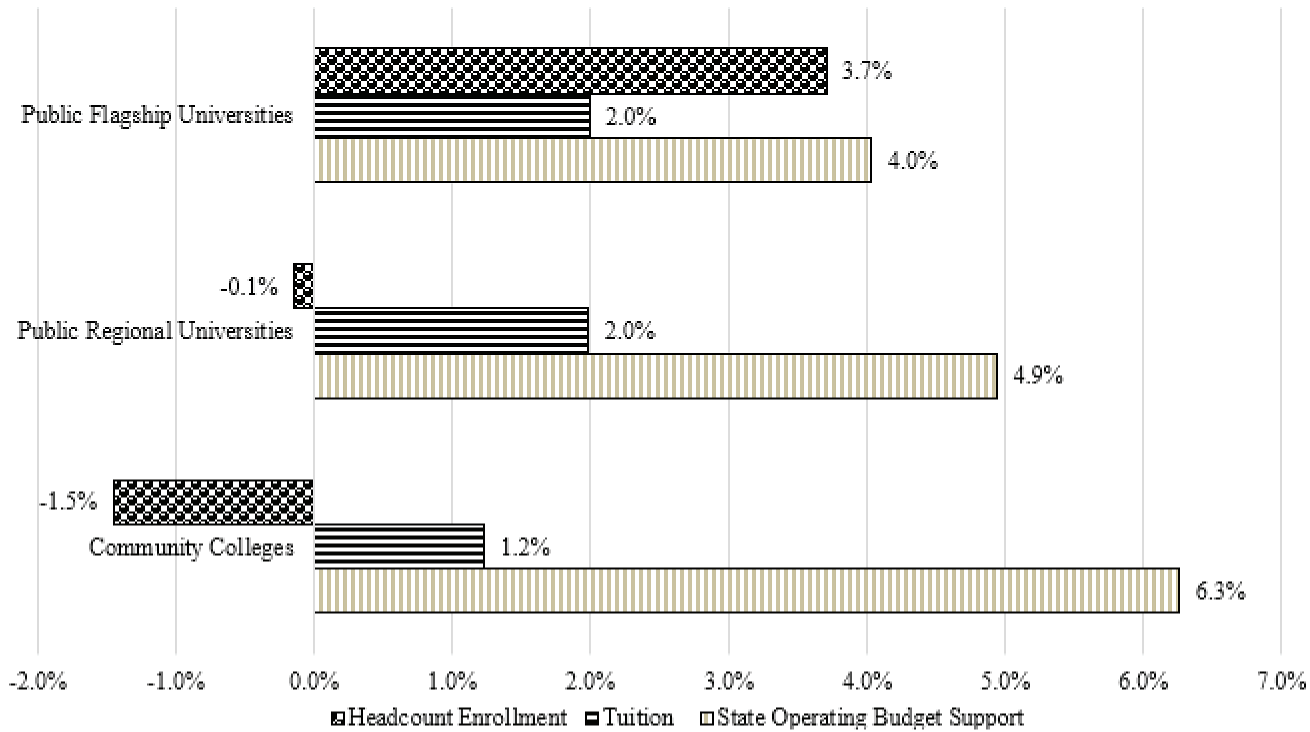
Figure 2 presents predicted changes in FY2022-23 in headcount enrollment, tuition, and state appropriations for operating budgets for the three major public higher education sectors. Respondents predict headcount enrollment in both public access sectors will fall next year—by 1.5 percent at community colleges and by 0.1 percent at regional universities (30 and 23 responding, respectively). Headcount enrollment is predicted to rise next year by 3.7 percent at public flagship universities (18 respondents). The predicted enrollment decline will likely translate into an immediate decline in tuition and fee revenue for many community colleges next year.

There is good news: state appropriations were predicted to increase at an average of 6.3, 4.9, and 4.0 percent, respectively, for community colleges, regional universities, and flagship universities, while predicted tuition increases by sector were 1.2, 2.0, and 2.0 percent, respectively. *The spread between predicted increases in state appropriations by sector and predicted tuition increases was the largest and most positive since we began these surveys in 2003.*

Respondents were asked to estimate the likelihood of mid-year operating budget cuts for higher education in FY2022-23, to which 23 of the 41 respondents indicated, “Very Low” and 13 indicated “Low,” while only four were “Unsure” and just one indicated “High.” None responded, “Very High.” When asked to respond to the item, “Increases approved by my legislature for next year (FY2022-2023) in state-funded need-based student aid will exceed predicted increases in tuition,” among 43 responses, 25 were in agreement, with 15 indicating “strongly agree,” 10 “agree,” and 18 “neutral.” with none indicating disagreement. This is the strongest level ever indicated in our surveys for state-funded need- and merit-based aid in the 20 years of this survey, which again speaks to the favorable funding climate in FY2022-23 in most states.

Figure 3 places the data presented in Figure 2 into context, presenting actual data for state appropriations for public higher education operating budgets and the Consumer Price Index for FY2018-19 through FY2021-22, as well as predicted increases for FY2022-23 as reported by our respondents. The number of years that increases in the operating budgets exceeded the inflation rate is written on each state. Institutions still must overcome the deep cuts in state appropriations taken over the prior decade that have squeezed students and families, resulting in student loan debt approaching $1.7 trillion nationally. The road will undoubtedly be challenging, especially if states revert to past practices when federal CARES and ARPA end, and should a recession occur.

Figure 2: Predicted Changes in FY2022-23 in Headcount Enrollment, Tuition, and State Appropriations



Source: National Survey of Finance and Access Issues, Education Policy Center, The University of Alabama, 2022

Policy Alignment of State Appropriations, Tuition, and State Student Aid

Advocates of the so-called "high tuition/high aid" model call for policy alignment of state policies for appropriations for public institution operating budgets, tuition and fees, and state-funded need- and merit-based aid. In essence, this means that whenever tuition is raised, so too must state-funded student aid and institutional appropriations to assist public colleges and universities to fund student scholarships and keep tuition affordable. Figure 3 defines policy alignment as follows: first, if survey respondents predicted increases in state student aid equal to or above predicted increases in tuition; second, if predicted changes in state appropriations for public higher education operating budgets exceeds the FY2022 Consumer Price Index inflation rate of 6.5 percent; third, if the predicted tuition increase is equal to or less than the FY2022 CPI inflation rate of 6.5 percent. Six states had policy aligned across all three; 19 states had alignment across two of three, 15 states had alignment across just one, and two states had no alignment across all three (responses were not obtained for eight states).

Predicted Fiscal Strain Next Year

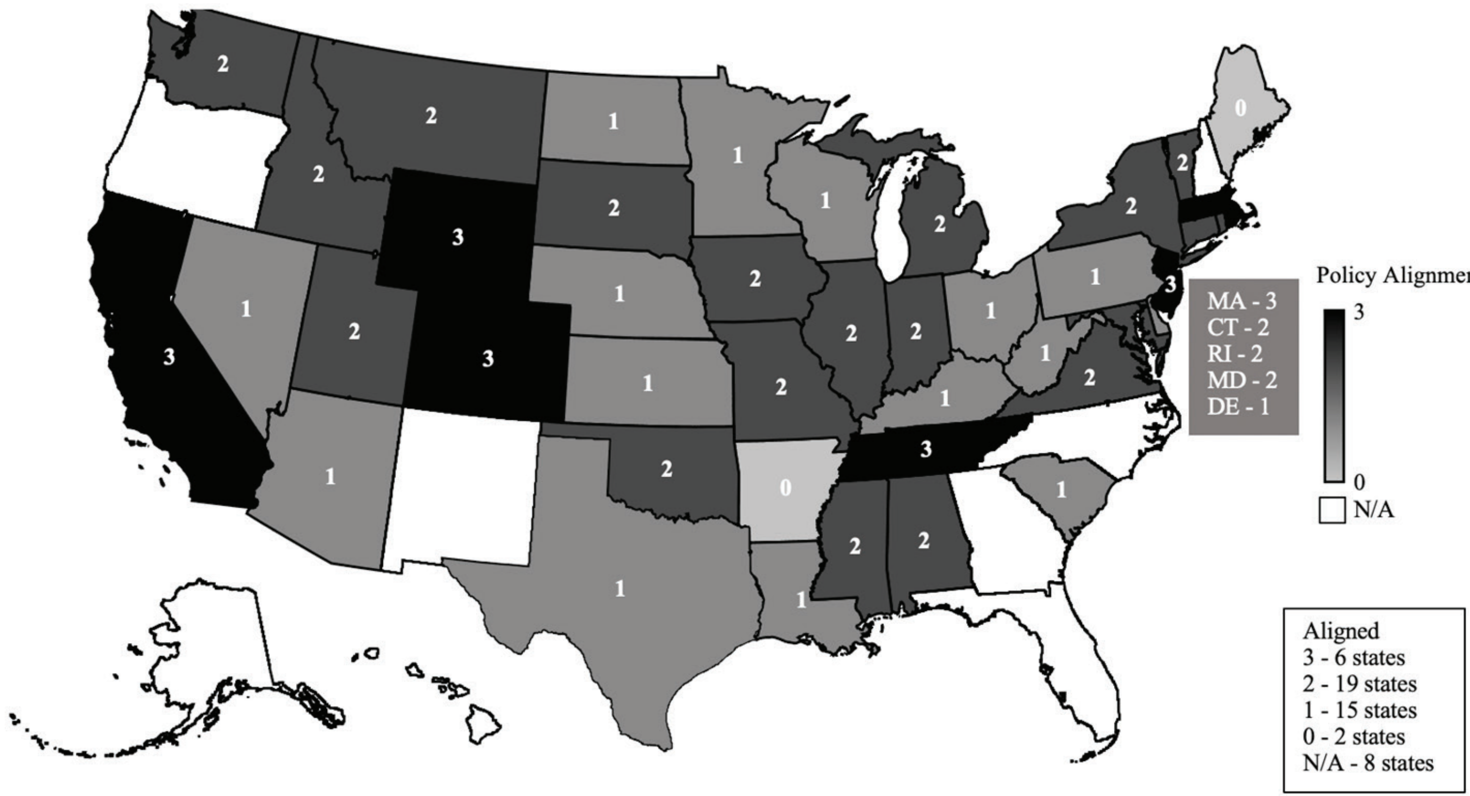
Respondents were asked to predict which types of community colleges in their states—rural, suburban, and urban—will face the greatest fiscal strain next year in FY2022-23. Among 38 responses, a strong majority of 25 were in agreement that all types of community colleges in their state would face fiscal strain next year. The rural number was slightly higher, with 26 indicating rural, and 23 indicating suburban, and 23 indicating their urban community colleges would face fiscal strain next year. Among the 38 indicating all community colleges would face fiscal strain, 11 indicate "strongly agree" and 15 "agree" that their state's rural community colleges would face strain next year. In other words, despite the very positive funding situation described above, a strong majority predict fiscal strain next year for all of their community colleges, with higher fiscal strain predicted for rural community colleges.

Facilities Including Broadband

As in past years, there is strong agreement for federal facilities funding. Among the 42 respondents to the item "Federal funding for facilities (renovation, new construction) is a major need," 34 are in agreement, five are neutral, and three are in disagreement. Among the 34, 15 indicate "strongly agree" and 19 indicate "agree," while two indicate "disagree" and one "strongly disagree."

When asked to respond to the item, "The pandemic exposed differences in broadband access, especially in rural areas," among 42 respondents 38 were in agreement, two neutral, and two in disagreement. Of the 38, 27 indicate

Figure 3: Predicted Alignment of State Appropriations, Tuition, and State Student Aid Policies for FY2022-2023



Source: National Survey of Finance and Access Issues, Education Policy Center, The University of Alabama, 2022

"strongly agree" and 11 "agree." There is also strong agreement for federal support to address broadband access. Among the 42 respondents to the survey item, "Federal funding for broadband is a major need," 35 were in agreement, four neutral, and 3 in disagreement. Among the 35 in agreement, 21 indicate "strongly agree" and 14 "agree."

Hot Topics

Respondents were asked about the impact of year-round (Summer) Pell Grants, which were enacted for one year in 2011 and renewed with passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017. Funding for summer Pell was enacted at $2,950 for summer 2017 and was increased to $3,247 in summer 2022. When responding to the item, "Summer Pell Grants help low-income students access and complete degrees," 39 were in agreement and three were neutral, while none were in disagreement. Among the 39, 18 indicate "strongly agree" and 21 "agree." But between the week of February 24 and June 6 of 2022, barely three months after Russia's invasion to annex Ukraine, the average price of a gallon of gas nationally had soared from $3.37 to $4.84. By the week of September 26, that price had fallen back to an average of $3.57. The doubling of gas prices immediately impacted every link in the American and global food production to consumer pipeline. To the item "Higher gas prices negatively impacted summer 2022 community college enrollment," state-level respondents were unsure: among 42 responses received, half were neutral, while among the 21 venturing an opinion 18 were in agreement (three indicate "strongly agree" and 15 "agree"), and three were in disagreement.

To assess inflation's impact, we asked the item, "Inflation will likely force my state's colleges to raise tuition above the Consumer Price Index next year;" of the 42 responses received 11 were in agreement, 14 neutral, and 17 were in disagreement. Of the 11 in agreement, four indicate "strongly agree," seven indicate "agree," 14 indicate "disagree," and three "strongly disagree."

Inflation concerns are just as real for institutions as the states; where states are constitutionally required to balance their budgets, institutions require similar planning. To simply maintain current service levels next year, the operating budgets of public higher education institutions must be increased at least by the inflation rate. If the state share is cut, or an effective cut is taken by flat-funding operating budgets when the inflation rate still increases, the alternative for institutional leaders is to propose cuts in programs and services, raise tuition, or both. This likely explains the uncertainty in our survey results, despite the generally positive funding picture.

When asked to respond to the item, "Tuition increases in my state may exceed next year's increase in the maximum Pell Grant of $6,895, limiting community college access for low-income students," just five were in agreement, nine neutral, and 28 were in disagreement (20 indicate "disagree" and eight indicate "strongly disagree").

Since COVID, we have seen a "great resignation" of faculty and staff, particularly in the age group of 62 and older. These faculty and staff are retiring *en masse*, creating a vacuum at many colleges and universities. To assess the impact of these retirements within the community college sector, we posed this survey item to respondents: "The 'Great Resignation' of faculty/staff challenges community colleges in my state." Among the 42 respondents, a whopping 35 were in agreement, four were neutral, and three were in disagreement. Among the 35, 16 indicate "strongly agree," 19 indicate "agree," four indicate "disagree," and none indicate "strongly disagree." Thus, by a margin of nearly 4:1, respondents indicate that staffing due to the faculty and staff departures is challenging the community colleges in their states.

Long-Term Planning, Capacity, and Access

States need long-term plans to accommodate and serve the needs of traditional and nontraditional students. When asked to respond to the item, "To increase the numbers of adults with college degrees and certificates, a long-term plan to finance the needed operating budgets exists in my state," just 12 were in agreement, seven were neutral, and 23 in disagreement. Four indicate "strongly agree," eight indicate "agree," 19 indicate "disagree," and four "strongly disagree." In other words, among the 35 venturing an opinion, by a margin of 2:1, respondents disagreed.

Similarly, when asked to respond to the item "To increase the numbers of adults with college degrees and certificates, a long-term plan to finance the needed capital budgets exists in my state," just 13 were in agreement, 12 were neutral, and 17 were in disagreement. Three indicate "strongly disagree," 10 "agree," 12 "disagree," and five "strongly disagree. In other words, among the 30 venturing an opinion, a majority of respondents were in disagreement.

Next year's positive funding environment is clearly better than 2012, as ARRA funding was ending. When asked, "How would you rate the *fiscal capacity* of your state to maintain state operating funds for public higher education next year?," among 44 respondents, 33 were in agreement (nine "strongly agree" and 24 "agree"), with seven indicating "neutral," and just two indicating "disagree" and only one "strongly disagree." But among 43 respondents to the companion survey item, "How would you rate the political willingness of state lawmakers to increase funding for public higher education?" most were neutral (25), while just 2 indicated "strongly agree" and 12 "agree," and three indicated "disagree" and one indicated "strongly disagree."

The uncertainty of the current fiscal situation and concerns over political willingness to support higher education ties to outcomes-related survey items. Among the 42 responses to the item, "Uncertainty of state funding and its impact on access and completion is an issue in my state," 30 were in agreement, eight were neutral, and nine were in disagreement. Among the 30, five indicate "strongly agree" and 25 indicate "agree," while nine indicate "disagree" and none indicate "strongly disagree." Thus, by a margin of more than 3:1, respondents indicate achieving progress in access and completion will be challenging, given uncertain future state funding.

DISCUSSION: INTENSE COMPETITION FOR STATE FUNDS IS LIKELY

It is clear that the injection of significant federal funds through the two CARES Acts passed in 2020 and 2022, and the American Rescue Plan Act passed in February 2021, respectively, provided federal funds to backfill funds to cover state matches for Medicaid. That expenditure category rose during COVID-19, dating to March 2020, resulting in less of a need to balance state budgets on the back of public higher education. States typically protect their constitutionally mandated elementary and secondary education systems, and when short of funds look to cut public higher education, starting with flagship universities first.

We interpret the number of respondents indicating "Uncertainties concerning ARPA funding" running out, and the seeming conflict between higher education cost increases going up as tax reductions as a state priority increase as reflects an intense competition for state funds. Concerns over a recession as the Federal Reserve continues to raise interest rates will only add to the uncertainty in the current year (FY2022-23) and the years following. We predict that pressures to bolster elementary and secondary employee salaries to address high teacher turnover, when added to the continuing pressures to fund Medicaid, and the added pressures of unfunded State Pensions and Federal Health Care cost increases, along with possibilities of a recession producing a decline in state tax revenue, and calls for tax cuts, will result in fierce competition for scarce state tax dollars for public higher education in the years ahead.

Clearly, the intent of federal policymakers to ease pressure on states through CARES and ARPA was largely accomplished. Our past reports, dating to 2003, have noted how tuition increases are the predominant method by which shortfalls in state revenues are addressed at the institutional level. Thanks to CARES and ARPA funding, predicted increases in state appropriations are higher than predicted tuition, by a factor of two to three for the two access sectors of Community Colleges and Regional Universities (in a forthcoming report, the Education Policy Center will document 951 community colleges, 439 public regional universities, and 107 public flagship universities across the United States). While tuition last year and next year is not increasing by levels two to three times the rate of inflation across higher education sectors, as occurred in the years after the Great Recession, there is still uncertainty about the future, especially when CARES and ARPA funding run out. The recovery time for state investments in public higher education following recessions takes an ever longer time, as Doyle and Delaney have noted.

Moving forward, it's clear that great uncertainty exists. The massive one-time injection of federal funds to states from CARES and ARPA resulted in state budget directors using those funds to backfill state matches for all federal programs, with Medicaid first. As soon as state funding for Medicaid lowered, states were flush with money, and public higher education and state student aid programs were immediate beneficiaries. Just one state reported mid-year cuts in 2021-22, and states were considering new investments in higher education—and tax cuts, as have been enacted or proposed by Democratic and Republican governors alike. But will proposed and enacted state tax cuts result in a tough year after the injection of federal funds run out?

In 2009, 47 respondents were in agreement that "Recession, producing a decline in state tax revenue" was the top budget item with a whopping 45 indicating "strongly agree." In contrast, in 2022, just 23 did so, and while the current budget looks good, 30 of 42 respondents were in agreement that state funding was "uncertain," and its impact on access and completion is an issue." Should recession hit and Medicaid matches stay high, the political willingness to support higher education in tough times likely means funding challenges for all public higher education sectors, community colleges generally, and rural community colleges in particular.

Table 1: Workforce Challenges and Community Colleges as Reported by State Community College Leaders

Workforce Challenges and Community Colleges in the Great Recession, Pandemic & Today			
Respondents in agreement ("strongly agree" or "agree") with the following statements	**2010 *(n=46)***	**2020 *(n=37)***	**2022 *(n=42)***
Unemployment rate (peak)	*9.9%*	*14.7%*	*4.0%*
Increasing unemployed/displaced workers have exhausted available workforce training dollars via federal WIOA sources for colleges.	31	6	4
Concerns over high numbers of unemployed workers are pushing community colleges to offer or expand "quick"(short-term) non-credit job training programs.	17	29	21
Declining student mental and behavioral health is a workforce issue in my state.			34
Increasing students' food insecurity is a work-force issue in my state.			33
Increasing students' homelessness is a work-force issue in my state.			24
Addressing diversity and inclusion is a work-force issue in my state.			34
The pandemic exposed differences in broad-band access, especially in rural areas.			38
Federal funding for broadband is a major need.			35
Community college enrollments in my state have recovered to pre-pandemic levels			6

The Community College Role in State Workforce Policy		
Respondents in agreement ("strongly agree" or "agree") with the following statements	*(n=42)*	%
Increasing attainment of Industry Recognized Cre-dentials is a state priority.	35	*83%*
Expanding the number of certificate programs as stackable credentials is a priority.	37	*88%*
Community college and labor market outcomes data are linked in my state.	24	*57%*

Table 1 (continued)

The pandemic exposed differences in broadband access, especially in rural areas.	38	*90%*
Federal funding for broadband is a major need.	35	*83%*
Community college enrollments in my state have recovered to pre-pandemic levels	6	*14%*

Data sources: (1) Peak unemployment rate data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2) Surveys of state community college leaders are from National Access and Finance Surveys, various years, Education Policy Center, The University of Alabama.