



OSA and ASPSU Survey Report

Joint Task Force on Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education, PSU Site Visit, March 30th 2022

A survey campaign was run jointly by the Oregon Student Association (OSA) and the Associated Students of Portland State University (ASPSU) in November of 2021 in order to gather data on the experiences and obstacles faced by PSU students from historically underserved populations. Students were asked a series of questions based on focuses laid out by the Student Voice Bill (HB 2590, 2021) and the Joint Taskforce for Student Success for Underrepresented Students in Higher Education; these areas were access, retention, graduation, and entry into the workforce. This was designed to discern what issues are the most impactful and wide reaching for students. They were also asked to self-identify as members of various minority groups. These groups were enumerated in the bill (LGBTQ+ student, student of color, rural student, low-income student, disabled student, undocumented student, student formerly in the foster system) as well as other underrepresented minority groups included at the discretion of the Associated Students of Portland State University (student parent, student with a GED or other high school equivalency, non-traditional student, non-native English speaking student, student veteran, and formerly incarcerated student).

1. Do you feel safe on campus as a member of an underrepresented minority group? Why or why not? What would help change that?
2. What are things that your school's administration or the state government could do to help you and people from your community improve their access to higher education? (In terms of affordability, admissions, graduation rates, retention of students, and job placement)
3. Do you have difficulty meeting your basic needs (food, housing, etc.) as a student? Why or why not? What would help change that?
4. Do you have difficulty paying for tuition or textbooks? Why or why not? What would help change that?
5. Do you feel supported academically as a student and as a member of a historically underrepresented minority group? Why or why not? What would help change that?

Data:

In total, 216 survey responses were recorded. Some students only gave feedback for improvement and did not mention their own experiences. Percentages will be based on the total number of students who gave clear indications for their own experiences to each question. Only demographics that consisted of greater than 5% of total survey respondents (greater than 10 respondents) were included and analyzed to account for statistical significance; for that reason, student veterans, undocumented students, formerly incarcerated students, and students formerly in the foster system were left out of the final analysis due to an inability to analyze the data of these communities in a statistically significant way. Their responses, however, were included in overall responses and totals encompassing the entire data set.

The results found that a large majority of students felt both safe and supported at PSU. Many of the factors that affected students feeling safe or supported are largely out of administrative control, such as members of the general public being on campus and negatively affecting the student experience; however, there are items that consistently appeared where there is room for improvement, such as more diverse representation from staff on campus, increased accommodations for students (specifically non-traditional students, culturally diverse students, online students, disabled students, and transfer students), and increased infrastructure to improve campus safety at night.

In contrast, the respondents indicated that most of the barriers to their access to higher education at PSU were financial. Over half of respondents indicated that they had difficulty paying for both basic needs and for university attendance. The main barrier to students in terms of basic needs appeared to be rent for places to live close to campus or better transportation to campus for those who cannot afford to live closer. Both students who had their basic needs met and those who had difficulty meeting their basic needs showed a high rate of utilization of campus resources to meet their needs, showing the effectiveness of these resources. For cost of university attendance, the high rate of tuition was one of the largest factors making this difficult for students to reach, with many students unable to qualify for financial aid due to the jobs they had to work to afford both cost of attendance and rent. Textbooks, however, seemed to be a common thread among the respondents; many indicated that their exorbitant cost not included in tuition or financial aid packages, low utility in classes, and low reutilization rate made them a much-dreaded quarterly cost that could be out of reach for many students.

Below are the proportions of the survey respondents who self-identified as a member of the indicated community whose responses were analyzed in the survey:

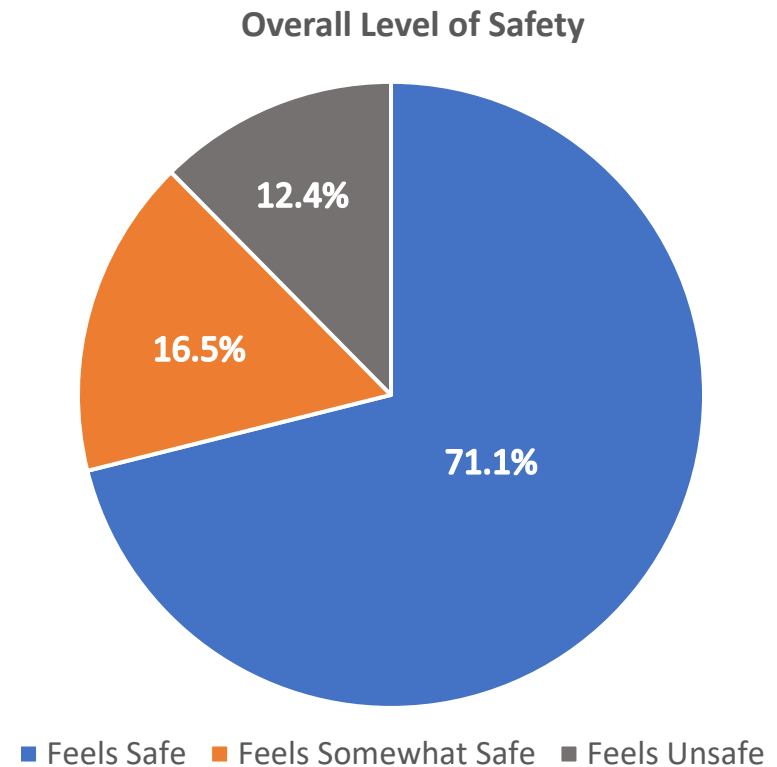
Underrepresented Community	% of Participants
Students of Color	46.75%
Low-Income Students	53.24%
Disabled Students	20.37%
Student Parents	9.23%
Non-Traditional Students	18.06%
Non-Native English Speakers	14.81%
Rural Students	14.35%
Student with a GED or Other High School Equivalency	8.33%

Question 1: Safety

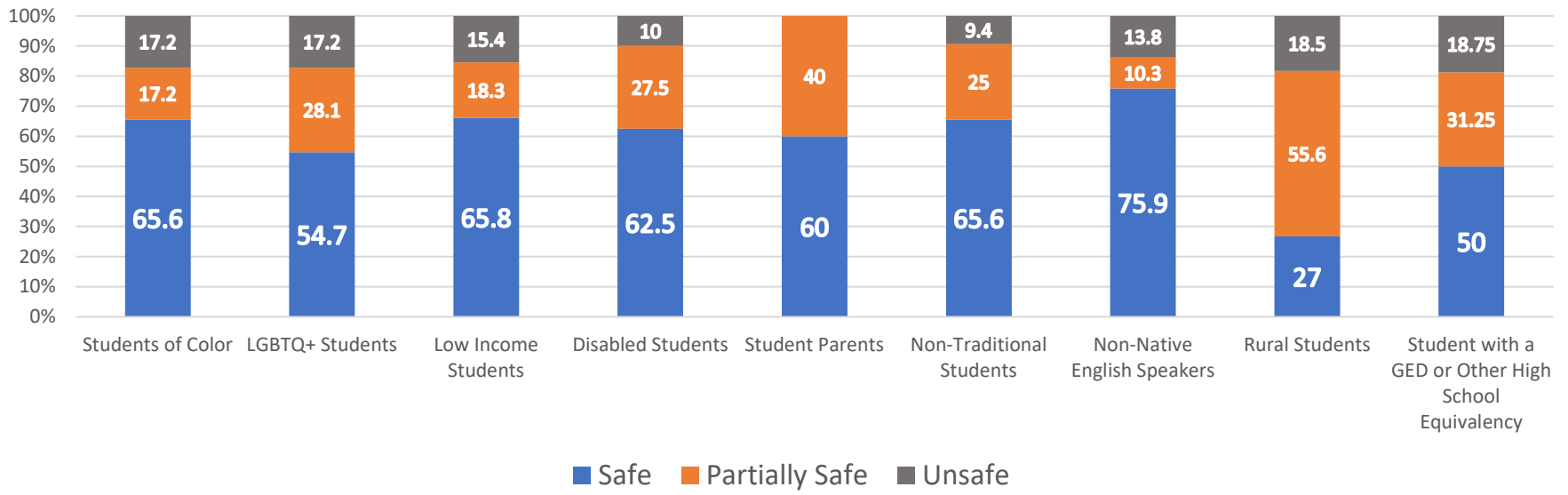
The majority of students felt safe on campus, with over seven out of every eight students feeling either safe or somewhat safe on campus.

Members of certain groups tend to feel much less safe on campus, with rural students feeling especially unsafe compared to the rest of those surveyed. Additionally, these same students, along with disabled students, LGBTQ+ students, student with a high school equivalency, and student parents, are much more likely to feel somewhat safe or safe with reservations on campus. Among the mentioned reasons for this lack of safety were underrepresentation, lack of resource awareness, lack of disability accommodations, police presence on campus and their carrying of guns, and the unhoused community around the campus. Most of the respondents who mentioned qualifications to their feelings of safety on campus had their concerns mostly surrounding negative interactions with non-PSU affiliated individuals on campus, encountering hate speech in graffiti on campus, and feeling underrepresented or undervalued in class and community discussions. Most respondents who indicated any level of unsafety indicated they would like more lights and other infrastructure on campus to feel safer at night. In addition, in terms of feeling more welcome and comfortable, most folks indicated they would like to see more representation and understanding of people from their community.

This survey was conducted in November 2021, before the Omicron or Delta waves of COVID-19 and before the removal of the state mask mandate.



Safety by Underrepresented Community



Community	Students of Color	White Students	LGBTQ+ Students	Cisgender Heterosexual Students	Disabled Students	Non-Disabled Students	Low-Income Students	Middle- and High-Income Students
Safe	66.6%	76.2%	54.7%	79.2%	62.5%	73.4%	65.8%	79.7%
Partially Safe	17.2%	15.8%	28.1%	10.8%	27.5%	13.6%	18.3%	13.5%
Unsafe	17.2%	7.9%	17.2%	17.2%	10%	13.0%	27.5%	6.8%

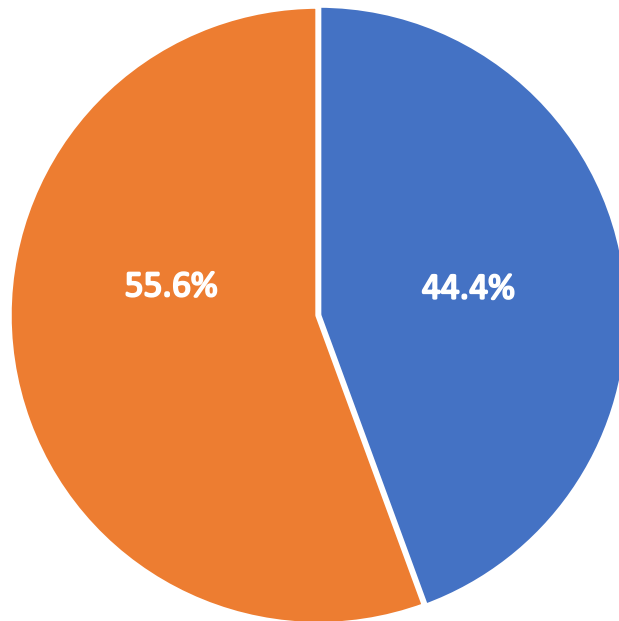
Question 2: Access to Education

Affordability was overwhelmingly the most mentioned area for improvement to increase access to education.

Students frequently brought up that their financial aid was not enough to cover the costs of education – especially textbooks. Students are relying on library copies, borrowing books from friends, torrenting books or choosing classes that do not require textbooks due to inflated costs. Students suggested including the cost of books in tuition, financial aid, and scholarships for textbooks specifically or offering free textbook options for classes as ways to improve access. The following items were most mentioned by respondents as ways to increase access and affordability to higher education for students from historically underrepresented groups:

1. Tuition affordability
2. Textbook affordability
3. Increase scholarship awareness
4. Increase employment opportunities and support
5. Housing access and affordability

Overall Ability to Meet Basic Needs



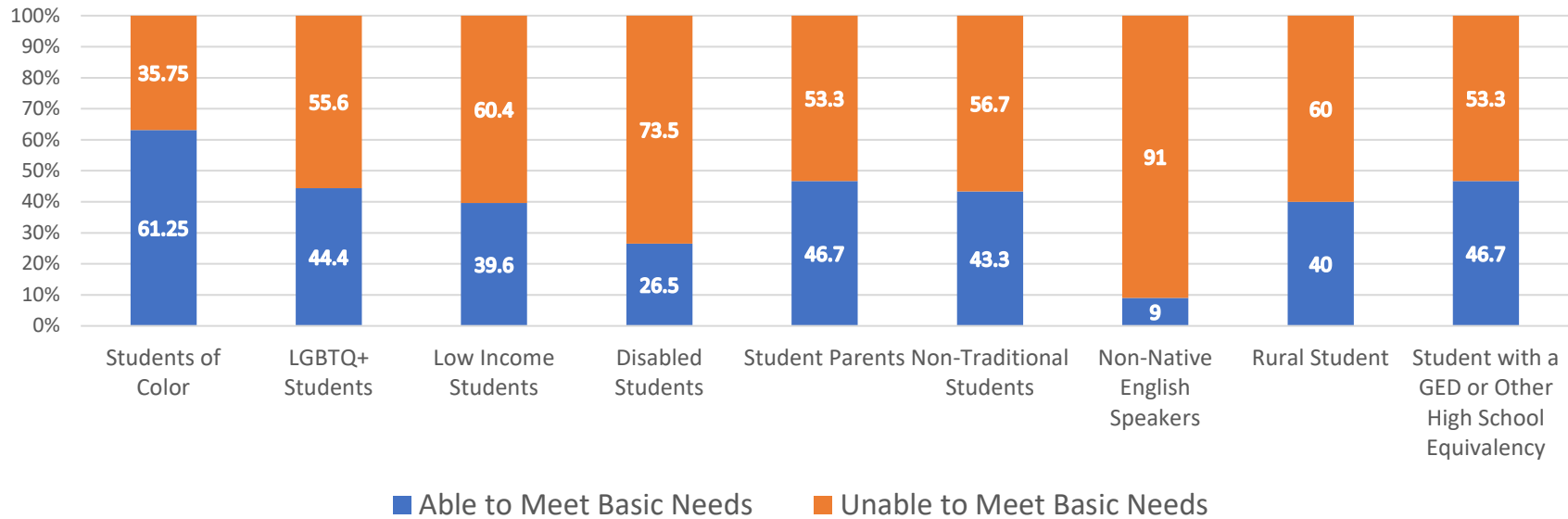
■ Able to Meet Basic Needs ■ Unable to Meet Basic Needs

Question 3: Ability to Meet Basic Needs

The majority of students surveyed were not able to meet at least some of their basic needs (housing, food, childcare products, menstrual products, health care, and technology items).

Low-income students, non-native English speakers, and disabled students indicated a much more challenging time meeting their basic needs than other survey participants. In particular, many non-native English speakers in the survey indicated that as international students, they had difficulty finding jobs to support themselves or had to take multiple jobs to meet higher tuition costs. Many respondents also indicated they were unable to take enough credits to qualify for financial aid because of the number of hours they needed to work to afford food, housing, and tuition. Affordable access to housing close to campus and affordable access to food on campus are common issues mentioned by respondents as barriers to having their basic needs met. Most students who indicated difficulty meeting their basic needs said that often, they had to choose between paying for tuition and paying for rent and food.

Ability to Meet Basic Needs by Underrepresented Community



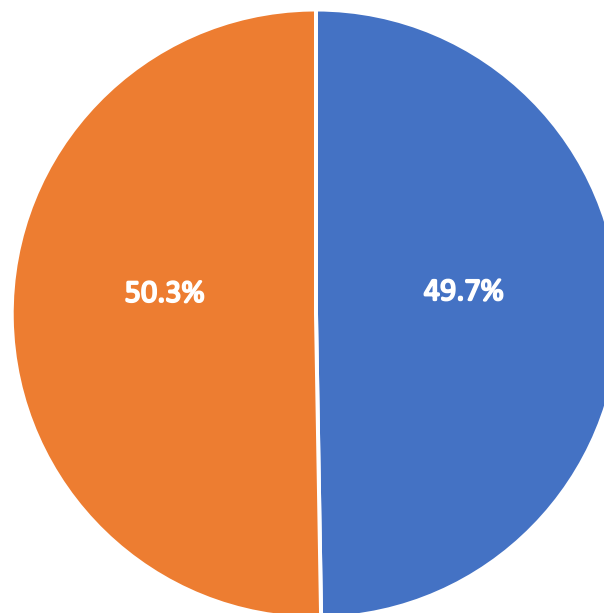
Community	Students of Color	White Students	LGBTQ+ Students	Cisgender Heterosexual Students	Disabled Students	Non-Disabled Students	Low-Income Students	Middle- and High-Income Students
Able to Meet	61.25%	50.6%	44.4%	60.9%	73.5%	63.0%	60.4%	79.4%
Unable to Meet	35.75%	49.4%	55.6%	39.1%	26.5%	37.0%	39.6%	20.6%

Question 4: Ability to cover costs of university attendance

The majority of students surveyed encountered difficulties in paying for college (tuition, fees, textbooks, and transportation).

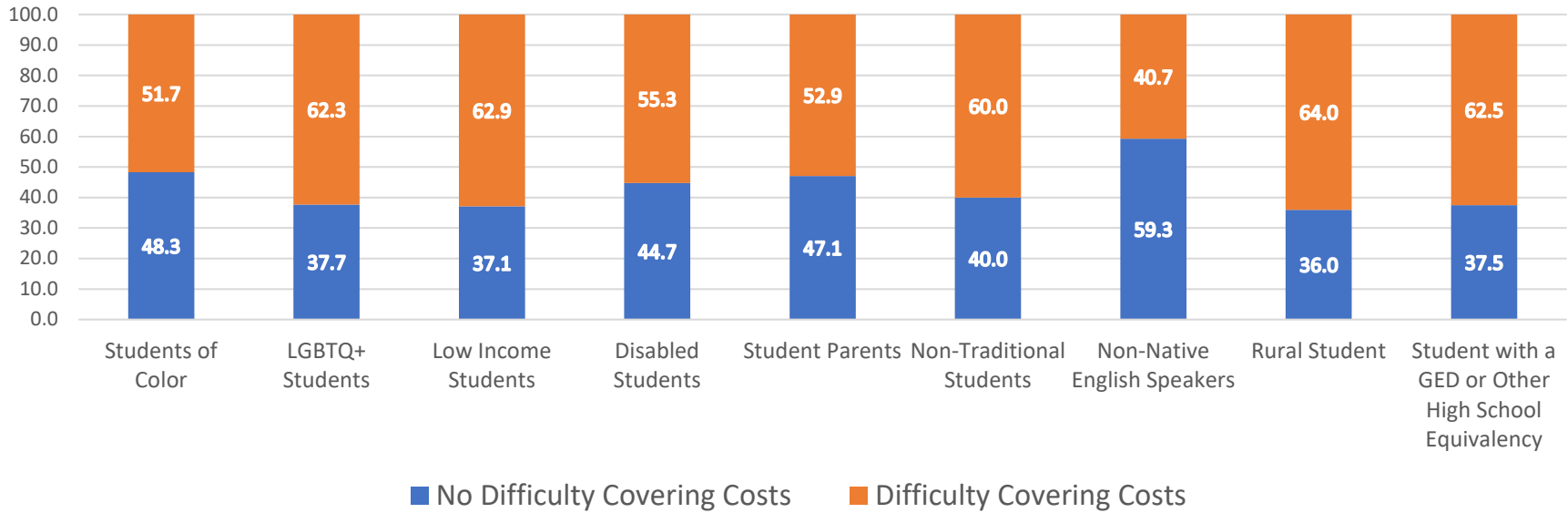
Over half of the students surveyed who did not encounter many difficulties in paying for college have their costs covered by scholarships, grants, loans, or work study programs. No single group is disproportionately affected by the affordability of university attendance. The increasing cost of textbooks, the required purchase of superfluous class materials, low pay in on-campus jobs, and high basic needs costs necessitating full-time work that disqualifies students from receiving financial aid are cited as the main obstacles for respondents in covering the cost of university attendance. In addition, undocumented students uniformly mention the lack of access to federal financial aid programs as an enormous obstacle in achieving financial stability. Most respondents specifically mention the high cost and low utility of textbooks and superfluous fees (e.g., building fees and recreational fees for online students) as being large barriers to affordability, especially for students who receive financial aid covering tuition.

Overall Level of Difficulty



■ Not Difficult to Cover Costs ■ Difficult to Cover Costs

Difficulty Covering Costs by Underrepresented Community



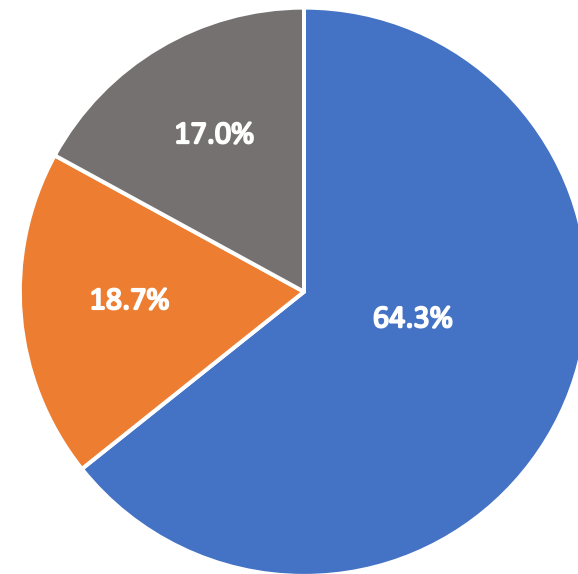
Community	Students of Color	White Students	LGBTQ+ Students	Cisgender Heterosexual Students	Disabled Students	Non-Disabled Students	Low-Income Students	Middle- and High-Income Students
No Difficulty	48.3%	51.5%	37.3%	56.9%	44.7%	52.1%	37.1%	71.4%
Difficulty	51.7%	48.5%	62.3%	43.1%	55.3%	47.9%	62.9%	28.6%

Question 5: Support from the university

Nearly two-thirds of respondents felt supported by the university, with around one-sixth feeling somewhat and not supported. This means that approximately five-sixths of all respondents felt supported by university systems and programs. Student parents and non-traditional students had the most qualifications around their feelings of support, however, with difficulty of navigating university systems, differing availability of resources to online students, difficulty working with professors for accommodations, lack of diverse representation in university employees, and institutional understanding of the situations of non-traditional and transfer students as the most common barriers to being fully supported by the university. Differing levels of funding of different departments and higher funding of executive salaries is also mentioned as an alienating factor for students.

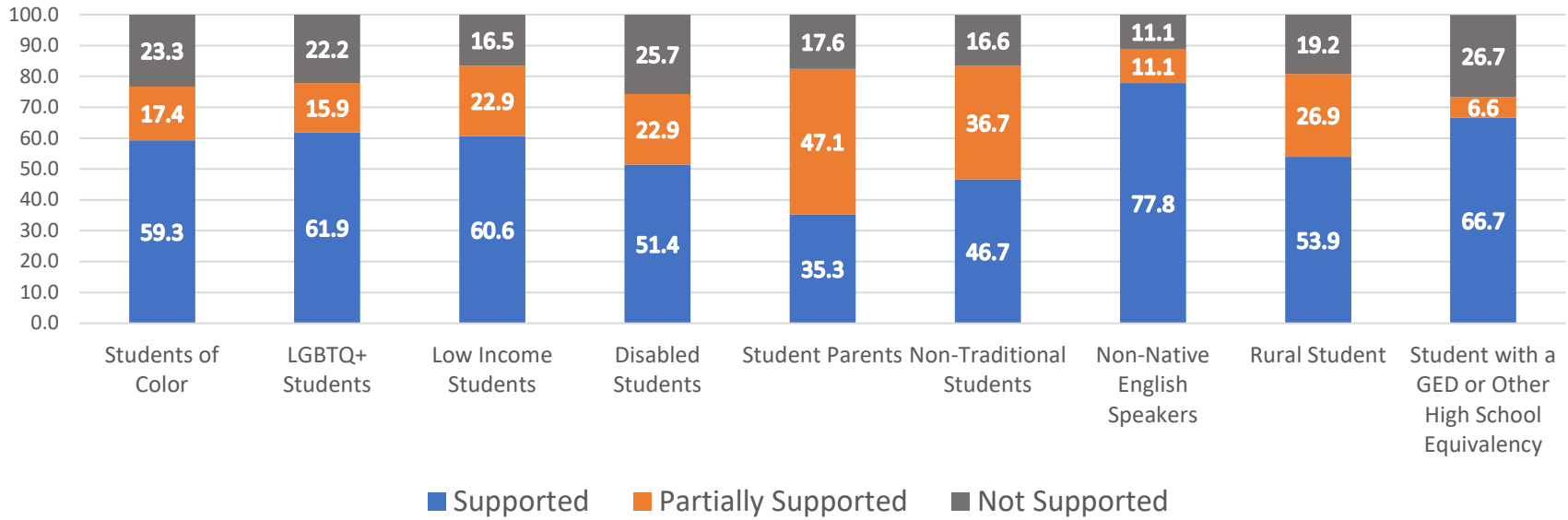
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Overall Level of Support



■ Supported ■ Partially Supported ■ Not Supported

Level of Academic Support by Underrepresented Community



Community	Students of Color	White Students	LGBTQ+ Students	Cisgender Heterosexual Students	Disabled Students	Non-Disabled Students	Low-Income Students	Middle- and High-Income Students
Supported	59.3%	54.1%	61.9%	53.1%	51.4%	52.7%	60.6%	62.2%
Partially Supported	17.4%	6.6%	15.9%	10.9%	22.9%	10.1%	22.9%	13.4%
Not Supported	23.2%	39.3%	22.2%	36.1%	25.7%	37.2%	16.5%	24.4%