



THE REGIONAL
**COLLEGE
HUNGER**
CONFERENCE

Research + Advocacy + Practice

Understanding the Scale and Cost of Basic Need Insecurity

Center for Equitable Higher Education

Studying and promoting economic, food, and housing justice





The Center for Equitable Higher Education

Studying and promoting economic, food, and housing justice

Vision

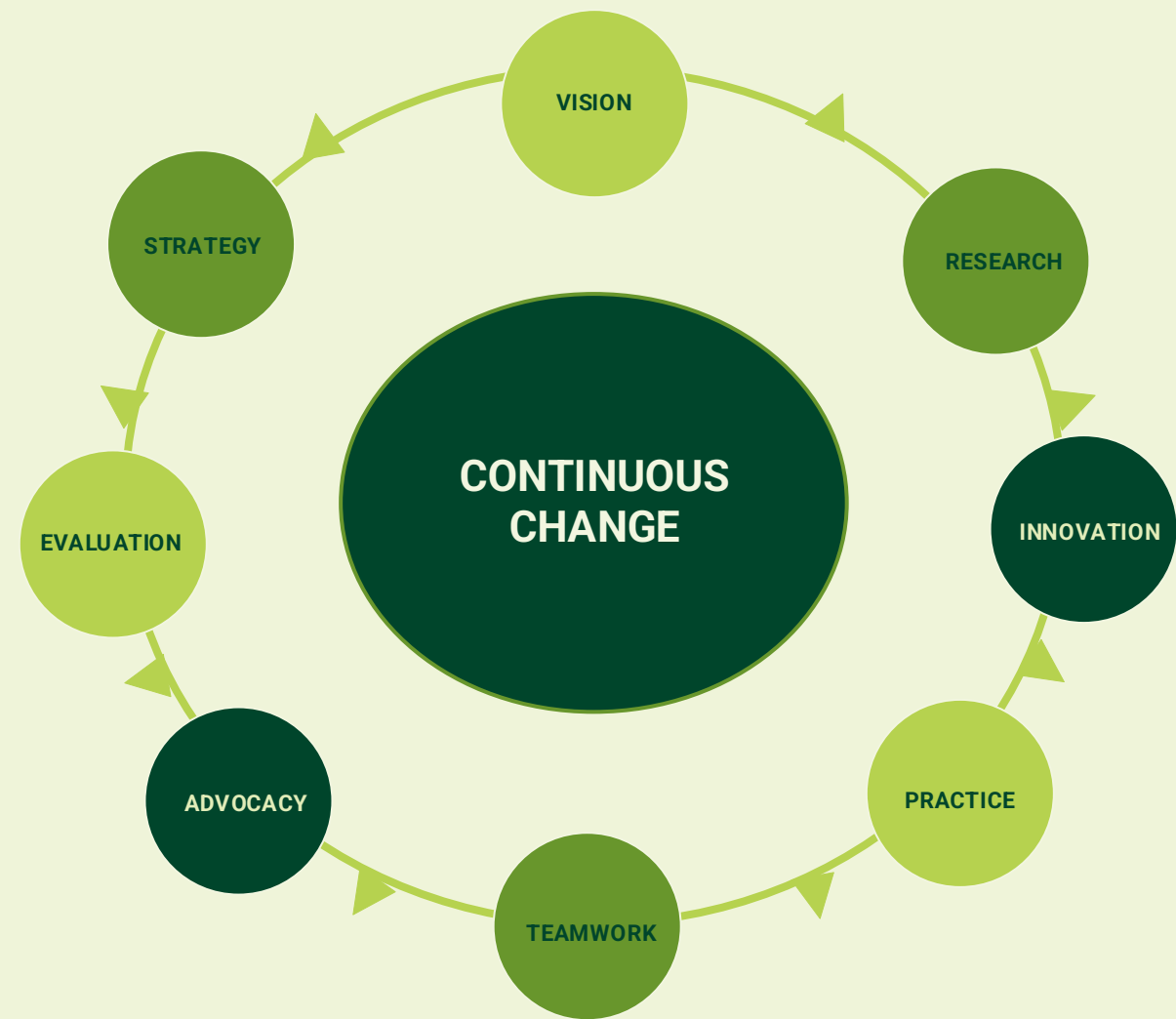
The Center for Equitable Higher Education (CEHE) is a trusted source of actionable research and catalyst of higher education systems that meet student basic needs and produce equitable outcomes.

Mission

As a research center, CEHE ensures that California higher education prioritizes student basic needs and implements equitable and effective programs so that students thrive and graduate. CEHE works to:

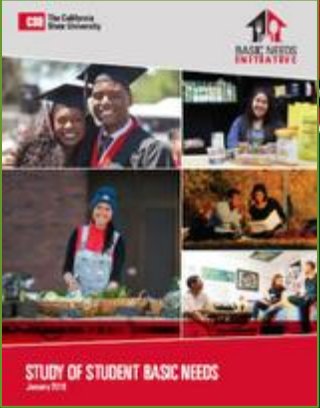
- **Amplify the voices of students and practitioners** as the experts of their experience;
- **Build evidence** on student basic needs in partnership with students, faculty, practitioners and other leaders in the field; and
- **Support practitioners, policy makers and other leaders** as they work to meet student basic needs.

Each turn feeds the next: Evidence sharpens vision, practice grows and prompts new questions, evaluation provides learning



Three studies turned prevalence into a support system

California State University's work shows how research can develop in stages: first map the problem, then measure student experience, then study whether services are reachable and effective.



2016

PHASE 1

Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students

Campus staff, faculty, and administrators described how CSU campuses were meeting student needs and where systems were thin.

2018

PHASE 2

Study of Student Basic Needs

A mixed-methods study across 23 campuses and 24,537 students connected food insecurity and homelessness to health and academic outcomes.

2021+

PHASE 3

Study of Student Service Access and Basic Needs

Survey, interview, and focus-group evidence showed underuse, navigation barriers, and the need to evaluate whether supports reach students.

Basic-needs research changed the question

What looked like individual struggle became a measurable condition shaping whether students could learn, be retained, and graduate or complete.



Student basic needs insecurity is an equity issue.

Food and housing insecurity is highest amongst

- Students of color,
- Pell eligible students,
- Students with dependents, and
- First generation college students

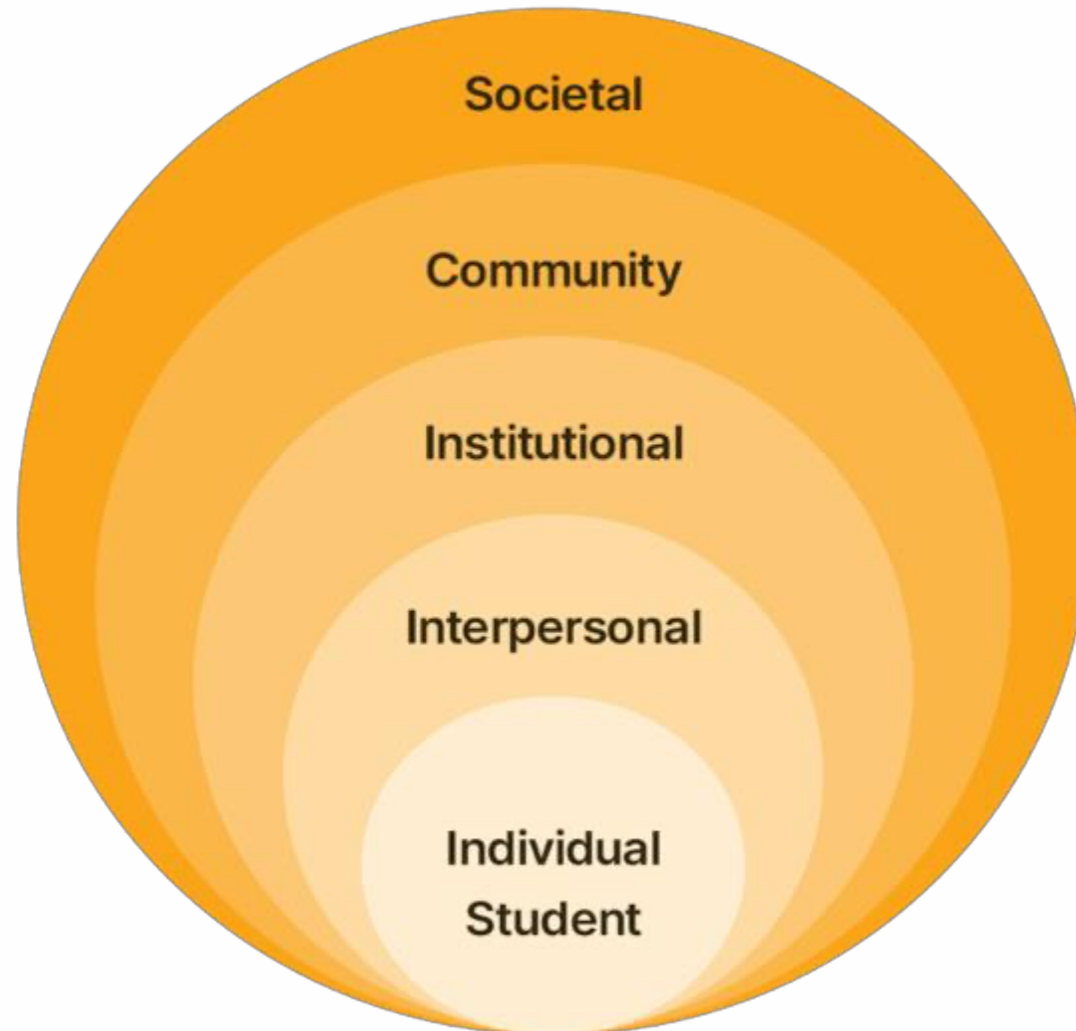
“[I’m focused on] saving money for my kids so they don’t have to go through this. [chuckles]...unfortunately I can’t change anything about my situation, but hopefully I can change the pattern for the future.”

Lenore

The RISE Framework

Relmagine the Student Experience

A Socio-Ecological Model of Student Basic Needs



Student basic needs are Student human rights



ADVOCACY



The Path of CSU Basic Needs Funding

2013 – No systemwide funding for basic needs

2014 – Research and direct services begin to be funded at individual campuses

2015 – CSU Office of the Chancellor funds Phase I of the CSU Study of Student Basic Needs

2015 – Campuses begin fundraising and program innovation

2016 - CSU Office of the Chancellor funds Phases II/III of the CSU Study of Student Basic Needs

2018 - Hunger Free Campus Initiative: Funds available to campuses that provide the following:

- MEAL SWIPES
- CalFresh Outreach
- Campus Food Pantry

2019-CSU Office of the Chancellor funds the launch of the CSU Centers for Equitable Higher Education (CEHE) at CSU, Long Beach and Cal Poly Humboldt

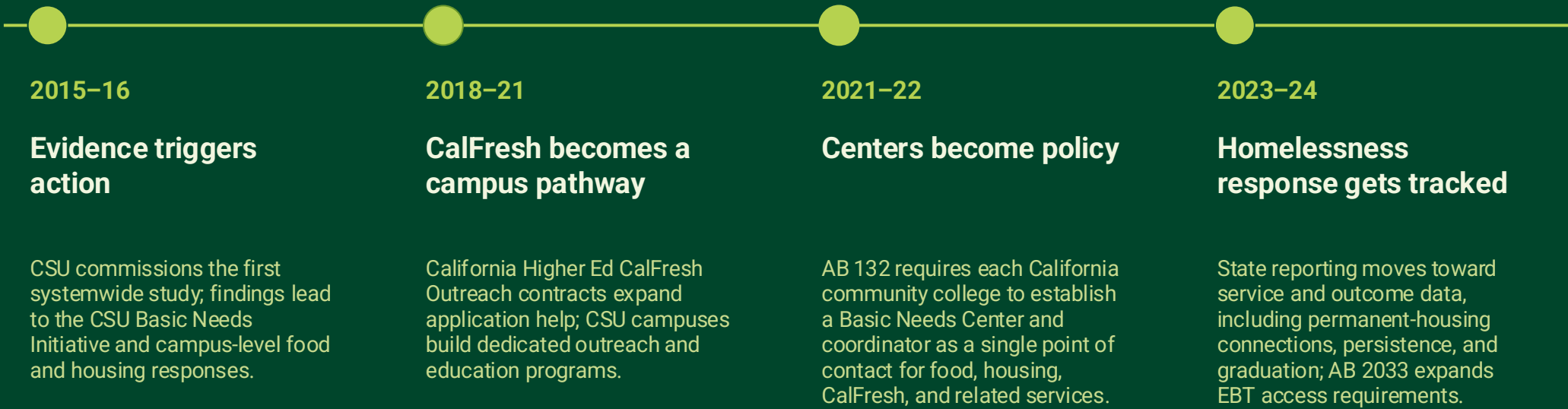
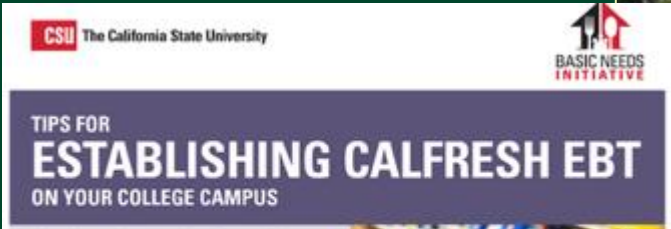
2019 - ECMC Developing Promising Practices for Serving California State University (CSU) Students Basic Needs

2020 AB 74 \$6.5 million and ongoing funding for Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) and RRH Evaluation on 8 CSU campuses

2021 AB 128 State allocates \$105 million in ongoing and \$295 million in one-time funding, \$15 million of ongoing funds for CSU Student Basic Needs.

From documenting need to building public infrastructure

California’s policy arc moved basic needs from a campus concern to a system responsibility, with CalFresh access and homelessness response built into the support architecture.



Policy change matters because questions shift from “Is there a problem” to “Who is responsible” to “Who can find help?” to “What must the system provide?”

The field widened from access to well-being and policy

Suzanna Martinez and Sara Abelson extend the story in two directions: what basic needs mean for students' health, and what institutions must change upstream.



● SUZANNA MARTINEZ

Health, food access, and the student-informed definition of basic needs

No Food for Thought (2020) linked food insecurity with poorer mental health and lower academic performance among students in CA

Campus Food Pantry Use (2024) examined whether pantry access was associated with more frequent fruit and vegetable intake among food-insecure UC students.

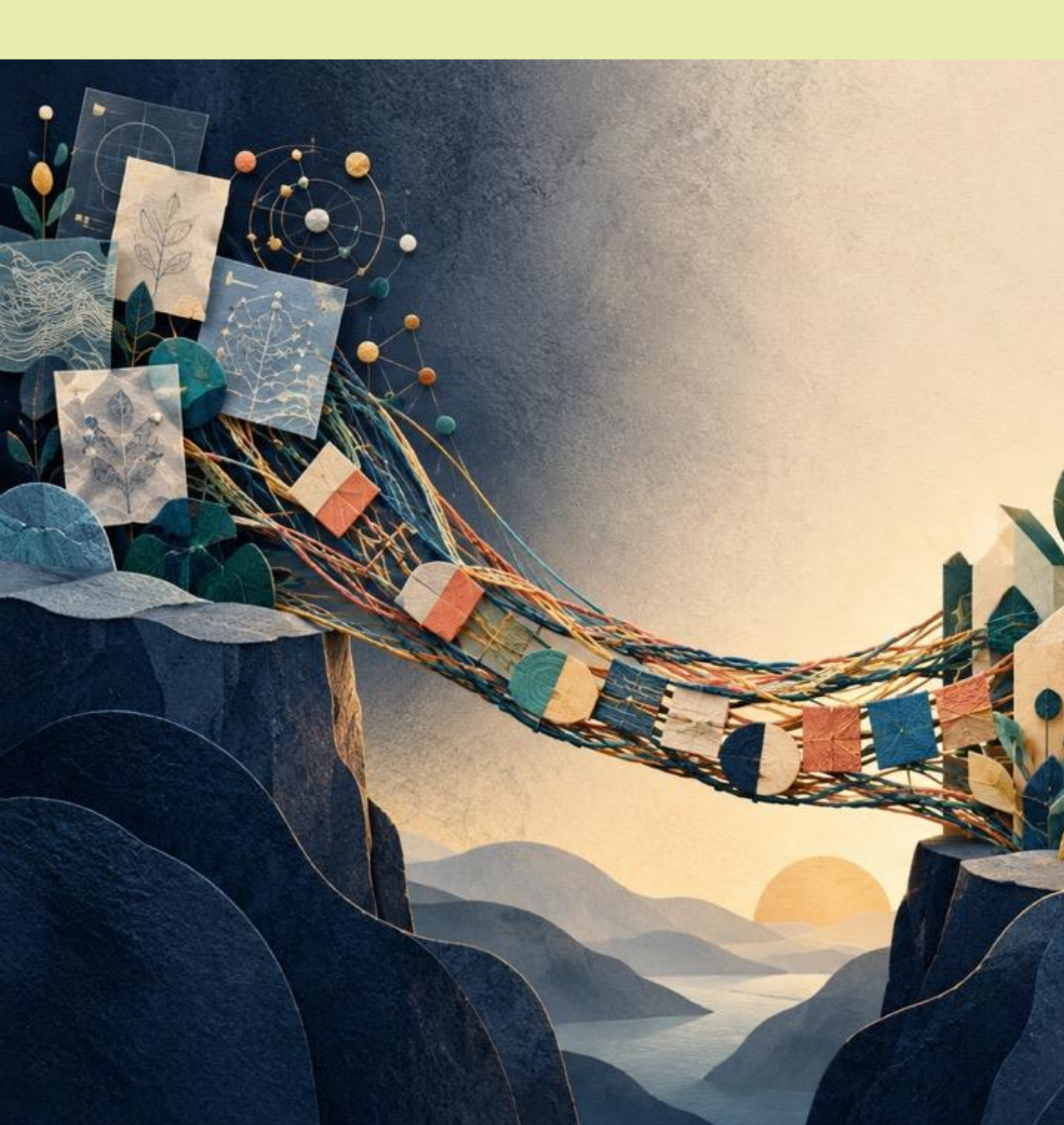
● SARA ABELSON

Structural action, mental health equity, and public investment

Students Are Humans First (2020) argued that basic-needs security belongs at the center of student success and equity work.

Assessing the (in)Sufficiency of Federal Investments (current project) examines whether federal grants for food, housing, childcare, and mental health are sufficient and equitably allocated.

Her work helps move the response upstream: from services students find to systems institutions design.



Support moved closer to the institution's core work

As the evidence accumulated, food and housing support evolved from isolated relief to coordinated student-success infrastructure.

See the system

- Urban Institute, *A Tangled Net* (2019): students often navigate a fragmented safety net.

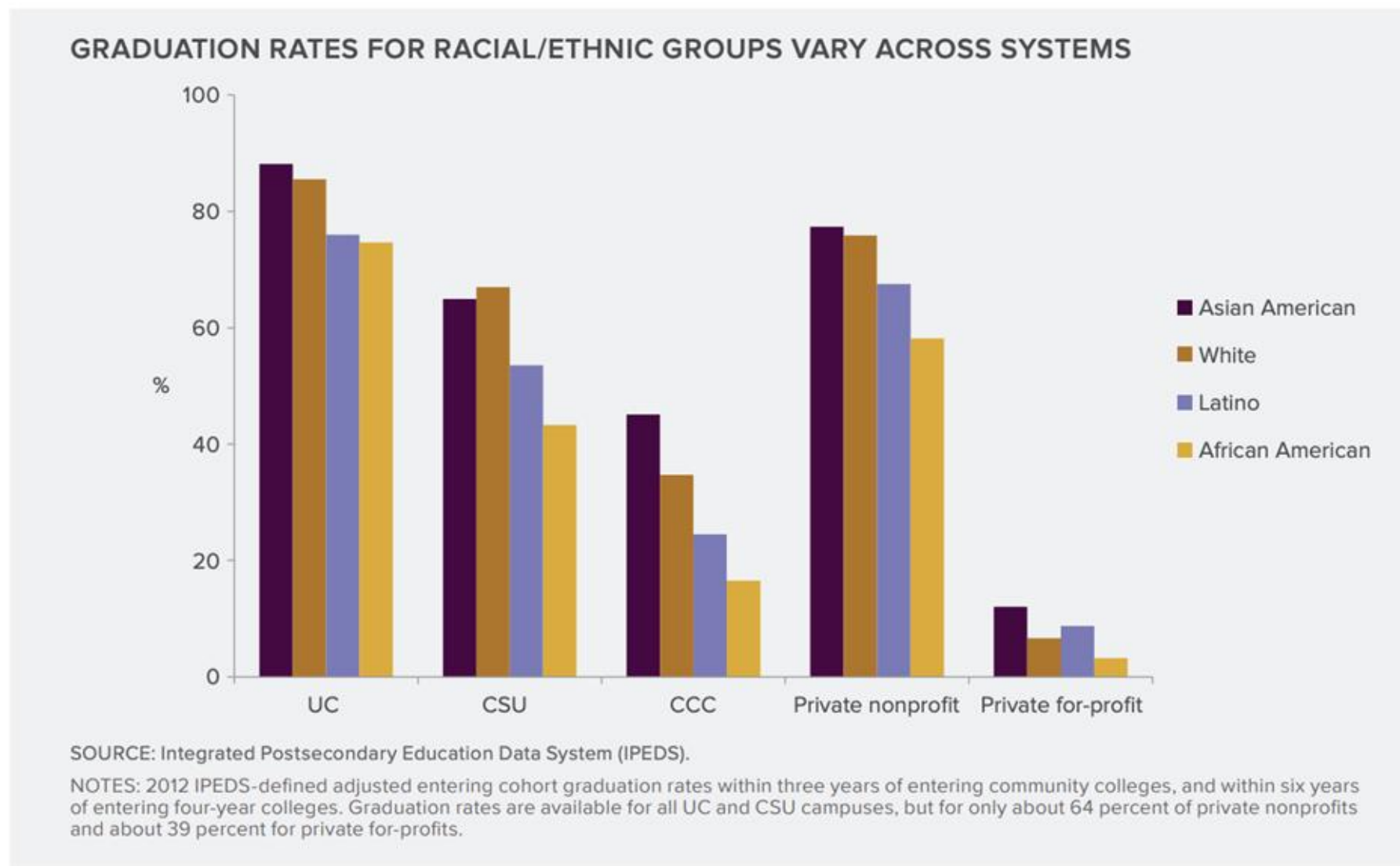
See the experience

- Trellis, *Studying on Empty* (2019): qualitative evidence made coping and timing visible.

Build the response

- Trellis Basic Needs Centers (2023): 36,000+ undergrads across 89 institutions shaped the case for integrated support.

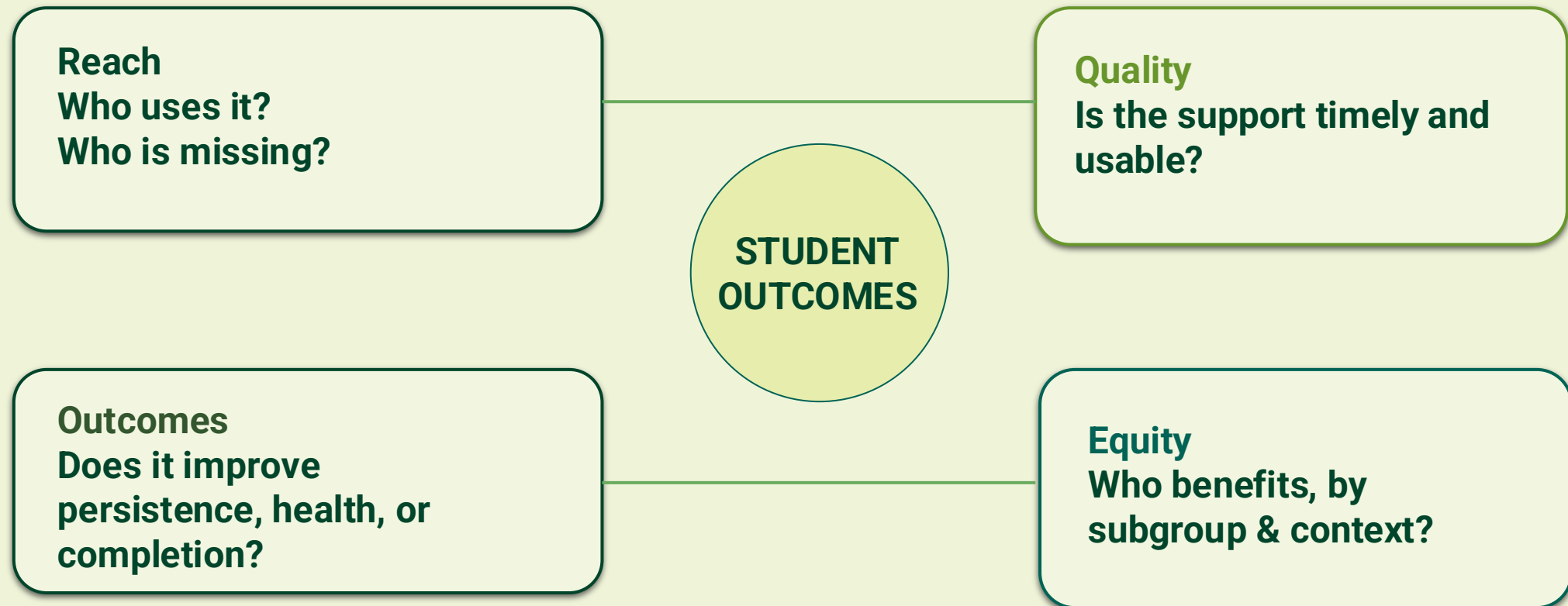
Despite much effort, California colleges have not closed racial equity gaps.



Q: What role does basic needs insecurity play in these differences?

Support only becomes strategy when campuses test what changed

Evaluation turns a well-intended service into evidence about reach, quality, equity, and student outcomes.



College Focused Rapid Rehousing Evaluation

Background

- In 2019, **the state of CA provided funds to the CSU, CCC, and UC campuses** to address the crisis of student homelessness
- CFFR Programs (rapid rehousing programs) include **housing assistance and other strategies** to address needs of students experiencing homelessness.

Key Findings

- 12 months after receiving CFRR, students were **significantly less likely to stop out of school** compared to students who just received a short-term housing subsidy
- **Average of 9 consecutive months of housing.** Most participants exited program due to graduation or transition into permanent housing.
- Challenging housing markets are a significant issue.



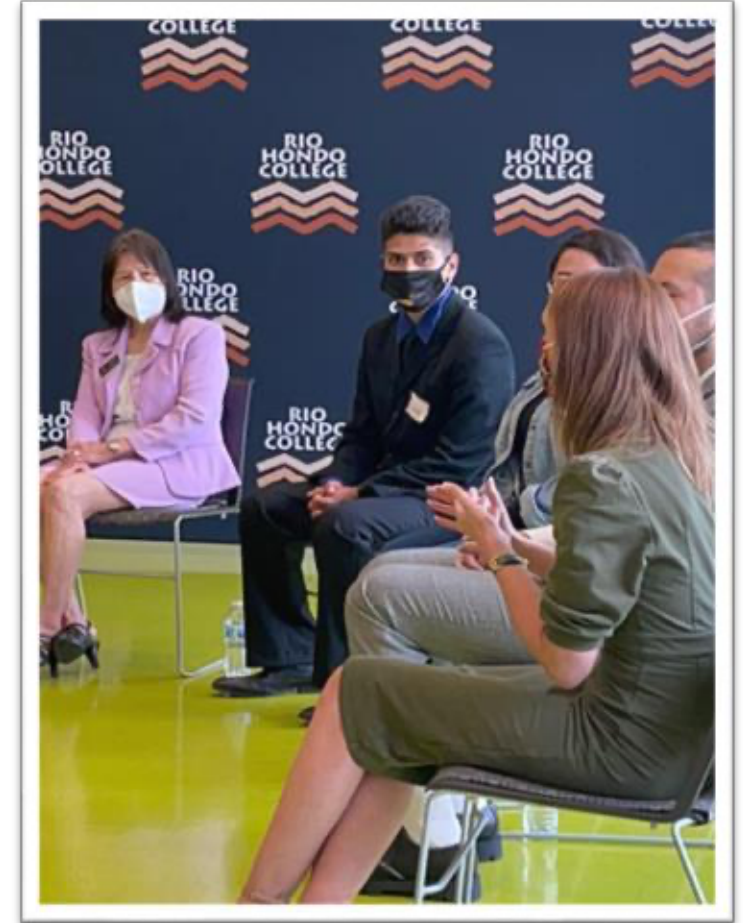
Rio Hondo College HOPE Scholars Program

Background

- HOPE Scholars was created for students experiencing homelessness or are transitionally unhoused and provides holistic services. In collaboration with Whittier College, students are housed in dorms.
- This **study aimed to better understand the experiences of students** in Rio Hondo College's Hope Scholars Program.

Key Findings

- HOPE Scholars **positively influenced students' ability** to focus on their education by providing housing, easing financial stress and addressing their educational, mental, and physical well-being.
- Positive relationships with staff were consistently identified as a part of HOPE Scholars' **success in providing emotional, social, academic, housing support**
- HOPE Scholars' application was quick, easy, and smooth, highlighting the importance of ensuring program accessibility





THE REGIONAL
**COLLEGE
HUNGER**
CONFERENCE

Thank you!



csulb.edu/cehe



chhs-cehe@csulb.edu



linktr.ee/center4_equitablehe



[@center4_equitablehe](https://www.instagram.com/center4_equitablehe)



The Center for Equitable Higher Education

