

Remapping Realities: Navigating School and Work Commitments, Financial Pressures and Well-Being

April 2024

Workers and Learners Series

Report by 2022 Labor Summer Research Program Team

Executive Summary

The current reality is that more than half of college students must work, many in low-wage jobs, in order to pay the high costs of college tuition and living expenses (Ángeles et al. 2020). Now more than ever, workers and learners are feeling the impact of rising inflation, the lack of institutional financial support, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges of working to pay their bills while keeping up with the demands of school in order to create a better future. Together, these strains have placed undue burden on working learners' mental health and well-being.

This study builds on prior research on the experiences of workers and learners navigating work, school, and life experiences as they adjust to the "new normal." Findings from this study are based on 151 surveys and 30 interviews collected from Los Angeles public college and university students in July and August 2022 by the Labor Summer Research Program student research team.

The following are key findings from our research.

Juggling School and Work: A Need for Course Flexibility and Organizing for Better Working Conditions

Workers and learners show a desire for flexible course offerings and an interest in organizing to address some of the continued challenges they face in having to sacrifice school opportunities for work commitments.

- **As work commitments increase, academic engagements decrease.** Nearly a quarter of working learners have two or more jobs, and more than half of working learners work 20 or more hours per week. About one in five students work more than 40 hours per week. Work commitments have led the majority of workers and learners (70%) to miss opportunities to attend office hours or joint tutoring or group study sessions.
- **There is a continued need for flexible course offerings.** Half of working learners stated that having more access to remote courses would help them balance their work and school schedules. A majority of workers and learners (72%) would also prefer to have more evening and weekend classes available.
- **Workers and learners are interested in organizing to change working conditions.** Although the majority of workers and learners (96%) have received no training at their workplace in getting involved in a union or workers' association, there is strong interest in

getting involved. Nearly 40% of workers and learners are somewhat to very engaged in student organizing efforts on campus, and more than half (52%) of workers and learners expressed that they would be interested in joining a labor union or workers' association to organize to make decisions about their working conditions.

Finances: Fighting for Basic Needs Amid Rising Costs

Workers and learners are burdened by a lack of institutional financial support. Those that receive financial aid still need to work to pay for basic necessities, which has become increasingly difficult amid rising costs tied to inflation.

- **Workers and learners don't receive enough institutional support in paying for their education.** While the majority (91%) applied for financial aid, less than half received Pell Grants to pay for tuition, even though more than three out of four workers and learners earned less than \$15,000 in income last year.
- **Workers and learners need to work to cover their basic needs and school expenses, even if they receive financial aid.** Workers and learners allocate their income toward a variety of expenses, such as food (86%), transportation (83%), school expenses (82%), utilities (55%), and housing (47%). Some of these expenses are not factored into the cost of attending school in applications such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and the cost of attendance provided by each college or university. Neither financial aid programs nor academic institutions have made arrangements to cover the cost of internet access for students.
- **Rising costs tied to inflation make it harder for workers and learners to meet their basic needs.** Over half of student workers reported experiencing financial difficulties due to inflation, and 20% even reported skipping meals for financial reasons.

Worker and Learner Mental Health and Well-Being

Workers and learners struggle to prioritize their mental health and well-being when juggling the demands of school and work. They meet additional challenges when seeking mental health services and information about campus resources that are available to support their needs.

- **Workers and learners face barriers to mental health support.** More than half of workers and learners have not sought out mental health services in the past year. When asked about barriers to receiving mental health resources, the top three cited were cost (54%), scheduling conflicts (51%), and stigma in receiving mental health services (25%).
- **The reality for many workers and learners is that self-care comes last.** Workers and learners must prioritize many competing demands and responsibilities between work, school, and life. While 41% prioritized completing homework on time, only one out of 10 prioritized engaging in self-care, although most (29%) reported that they would have preferred prioritizing self-care.
- **Workers and learners need more information about the campus resources available to them.** Although the majority of students (59%) are aware of resources on campus that can support workers and learner, more than a quarter are still unaware of the resources that can better support them.

Recommendations

There is still a lot that needs to be done for workers and learners to thrive personally, professionally, and academically. It will require support from workers and learners, faculty and administration, and educational policymakers. We recommend the following to improve the working and learning conditions for workers and learners:

1. Workers and learners need to ask peers, counselors, and faculty for information on the resources that can better support them. It is important to reach out for help when needed, particularly to peers who share similar experiences and may know of opportunities and additional resources available to them.
2. Workers and learners need to share their stories. It is important for workers and learners to share their stories more widely and validate the broad range of worker and learner experiences so they know they are not alone.
3. Support more hybrid and asynchronous learning environments in school. Workers and learners value flexibility when it comes to their learning and working. Schools need to invest in better technology to support hybrid learning environments.
4. Implement training for faculty and administration to better support workers and learners, as well as educational workshops for workers and learners regarding their rights as workers. Training regarding the realities of workers and learners is crucial for faculty and administration to be able to design courses with worker and learner needs in mind. Additionally, workers and learners would benefit from workshops to inform them of their rights as workers.
5. Make mental health services accessible and affordable for all workers and learners. Provide more funding for workers and learners, and hire more staff to help make mental health services more accessible for workers and learners.
6. Expand FAFSA eligibility. Expand the socioeconomic status brackets for who can qualify for financial aid. Allow workers and learners under the age of 24 to claim themselves as independents on their FAFSA to lessen the administrative burden on workers and learners and their families.
7. Increase on-campus jobs wages, and ensure that there are more jobs related to worker and learner majors and career fields. Increase the pay scale for on-campus jobs, and provide more opportunities for workers and learners to gain fieldwork experience in the majors they are pursuing, to prepare them for their future careers.

Introduction

In Los Angeles, the vast majority of college students are workers and learners. Previous studies have found that about four out of five students in LA County who work also take at least 12 units of coursework (Ángeles et al. 2020). In order to afford the rising cost of tuition and to cover basic living expenses, most students have no choice but to work. As a result, workers and learners often have to sacrifice their academic performance and mental well-being to juggle the demands of work and school. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated preexisting vulnerabilities and added new challenges around virtual learning and staying safe at work. As workers and learners continue to adjust to the “new normal” of working and learning in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to understand their shifting needs in relation to their unique overlapping identities.

Broader cultural and economic shifts created barriers for workers and learners—most notably, the gradual rise in the cost of an education in the United States. As neoliberal ideology spread throughout the economic system, colleges changed in fundamental ways—they began to prioritize economic profitability and efficiency (Saunders 2010). During the Great Recession, from late 2007 to 2009, the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) increased tuition because state contributions decreased significantly (Mitchell et al. 2017). As colleges prioritized their profitability, tuition costs rose, and students carried the burden of taking on significant debt and economic stress. The shift in economic ideology forced students to work to afford their education and basic necessities, with lasting consequences for generations to come (Kyte 2017). Today, students need to work, and this can have a negative impact on their academic performance. Valuable time that could be utilized for studying is instead spent working long shifts. The conflicting demands of different work and school obligations cause increased stress and decreased sleep, minimizing the time and energy students can allocate to their academic goals (Semuels 2015). Furthermore, employers often overlook working learners’ academic sacrifices, as many create unsupportive and unaccommodating work environments (Ángeles et al. 2020).

In addition to key structural shifts, it is important to consider how working learners’ multiple identities continue to shape their unique experiences. For example, many workers and learners also identify with being low income, first generation, parents or caregivers, people of color, or undocumented. Many low-income students face increased financial stress and rely on the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program to help pay for college (Martinez et al. 2012). However, workers and learners often find this financial assistance insufficient to cover the rising costs of university tuition, fees, and other expenses. Students who rely on FWS struggle to support themselves and their families, and work multiple jobs to make ends meet (Jack 2019). Additionally, workers and learners of color often have to overcome the adversities that come with their employment in low-wage jobs and the inherent prejudices and biases they face at work and school. For example, Black male students at community colleges were found to experience difficulties balancing schedules, getting enough sleep, and managing relationships with their supervisors due to the compounding stresses of school, work, and their racial identities (Wood, Harrison, and Jones 2016). For undocumented populations of Latin

American origin, getting a higher education can be a major stepping stone toward future prosperity for themselves and their families, but they are often met with legal restrictions and economic barriers to school and work (Abrego and Gonzales 2010). Workers and learners carry multiple intersecting identities, each with their own unique challenges.

For many workers and learners, the strain of balancing work, school, and personal obligations can feel like a never-ending cycle. One possible solution can be found in organizing efforts, where workers and learners can identify and advocate for their needs. Student organizing is not a new concept but a historically powerful phenomenon that can uplift student voices when used efficiently. Students already have unions in the UC system and other colleges, although most of these union populations are made up of graduate students (Borzekowski 2019). Effective organizing relies on a shared identity and support between union leaders and members and can be increasingly effective when innovation is combined with tried-and-true negotiation techniques (Simms et al. 2018). Given the potential that organizing has to be an effective strategy for bettering the lives of workers and learners on a tangible scale, the current study examined their interest in organizing for better working and learning conditions. Additionally, the report explores the need for continued course flexibility and identifies barriers to addressing worker and learner mental health needs.

About the Study

This study was designed by a team of 30 UCLA students from the Labor Summer Research Program (LSRP), a seminar and field research class. The survey was conducted in English and covered a range of topics, including transportation, financial wellness, mental health, campus resources, and workplace organizing. The survey took approximately 30 minutes to complete, and each interview took about 30–60 minutes.

To qualify for the study, participants had to be 18 years or older, employed, and enrolled in college. LSRP researchers used convenience sampling, recruited participants through their personal networks, and conducted outreach in person, via email, and through social media. The fielding occurred over a six-week period from July 2022 to August 2022. Participants received \$20 for completing the survey and/or interview. The survey was hosted on the Qualtrics platform. Data were analyzed with Google Sheets. Each LSRP researcher coded two interviews, working together to develop the codebook on Google Sheets. Survey data were analyzed using pivot tables in Google Sheets.

The LSRP 2022 survey included data from 151 participants who work at least one job and attend a public college or university in Los Angeles County. Students also collected 30 in-depth interviews. Students disseminated key findings and recommendations through a public webinar.

Due to study limitations, the current study sample is skewed toward younger college students (ages 18–24), UCLA students, and Latino/a/x workers and learners. The LSRP 2022 researchers worked to synthesize the data they collected and develop this report.

Report Roadmap

The following report is split into three main sections. The first section will go over the struggles of juggling school and work and the impact on worker and learner academic engagement. The second section will go over financial difficulties, including paying for basic necessities, inflation, and the limits of financial aid. The last section will go over worker and learner barriers to improving their mental health. To actively begin to deconstruct some of the challenges and barriers for workers and learners and to improve conditions for them, our research provides recommendations and a call to action for collaborative efforts from students, faculty/administration, and policymakers.

1. Juggling School and Work: A Need for Course Flexibility and Organizing for Better Working Conditions

Faced with the competing demands of work and school, workers and learners are forced to make difficult decisions around working to pay for their basic needs or prioritizing their education for a better future. For many workers and learners, that means prioritizing their work responsibilities over their education. However, maintaining flexible learning practices can help workers and learners manage the demands of their work schedules. In addition, workers and learners have shown increased interest in organizing to improve their working conditions.

As Work Commitments Increase, Academic Engagements Decrease

Most workers and learners have jobs that are unable to accommodate their school schedules and responsibilities. The average workday for workers and learners consists of a morning shift that starts between 4:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., with about one out of four working an eight-hour shift during the weekday. More than half of workers and learners are working 20 hours or more per week, which prior research indicates can be harmful to younger students' academic performance (Carnevale et al. 2015). In particular, more than half report starting their work shift between 8:00 a.m. and 12:00 p.m., with almost a quarter reporting having to start their job between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. (17%) or between 6:00 p.m. and 12:00 a.m. (7%).

Figure 1: Time Daily Work Shift Begins

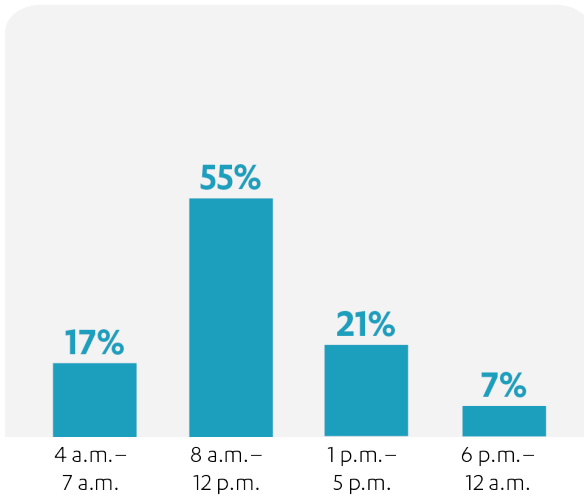


Figure 2: Length of Recent Daily Work Shift

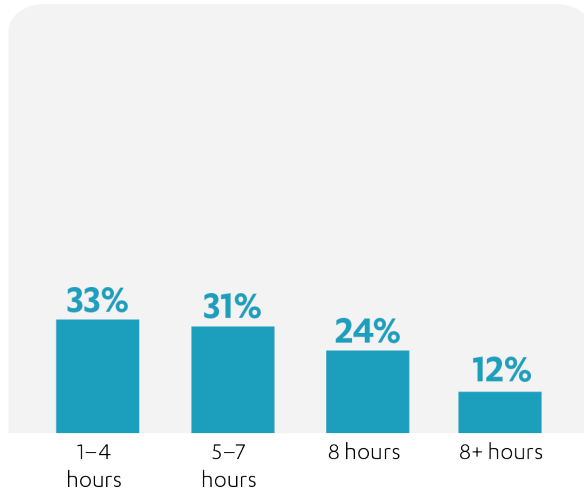


Figure 3: Days of the Week Usually Worked

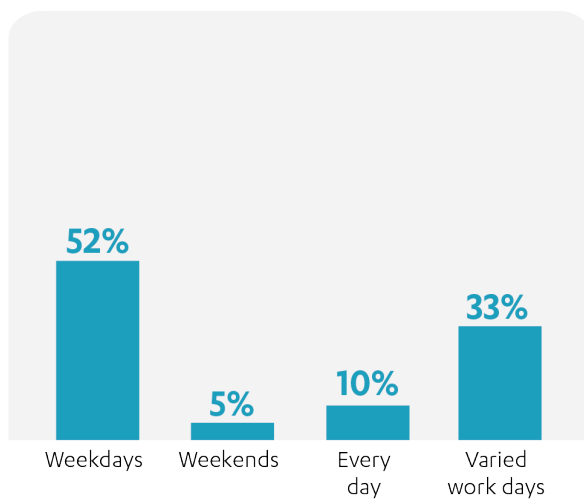
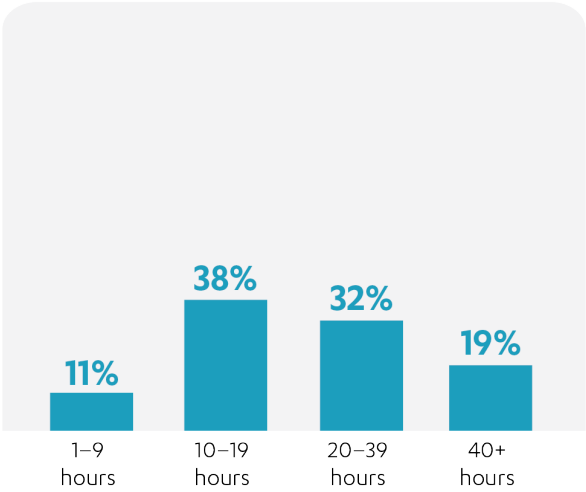


Figure 4: Typical Number of Hours Worked per Week



The majority of workers and learners have one job, but almost a quarter report working two or more jobs. In addition, more than half of workers and learners report having off-campus jobs.

It is clear that work has become an integral part of the daily routine for workers and learners. The data also suggest that the reality for some workers and learners is that they are often working multiple jobs located off campus. This likely requires additional coordination, since the majority of class lectures and campus events occur on weekday mornings or afternoons, and commutes to off-campus jobs are longer and more expensive.

Figure 5: Number of Jobs Worked

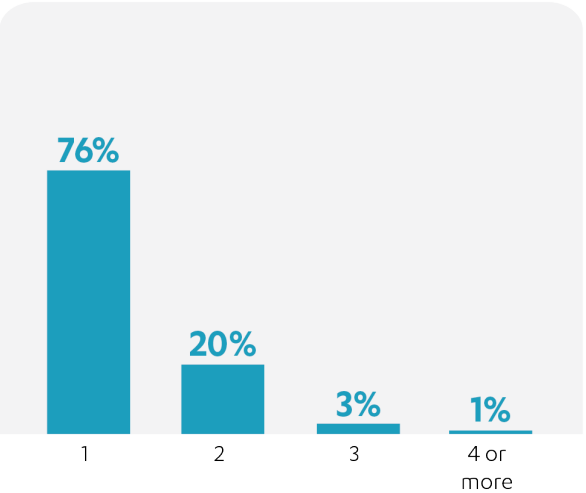
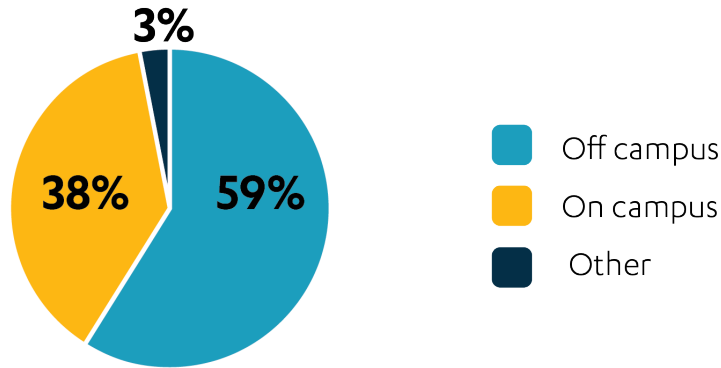


Figure 6: Workplace Location



Even with work commitments increasing among workers and learners, there is evidence to show that employers are mindful of worker and learner school responsibilities, with the majority (82%) reporting that their school-related scheduling requests are sometimes or very often accommodated. In addition, employers appear to respect worker and learner rights, with almost three-fourths reporting that they are not expected to be on call on their days off, and more than half (56%) reporting that they have not been asked to complete additional tasks outside their normal responsibilities.

However, not all workers and learners have the same experiences with their employers. About a third of workers and learners report being expected to be on call on their days off, and nearly half (44%) report being asked to do additional work tasks such as cleaning after their shift, staying late to lock up, or completing extra administrative tasks.

Figure 7: Employer Accommodates School-Related Scheduling Request

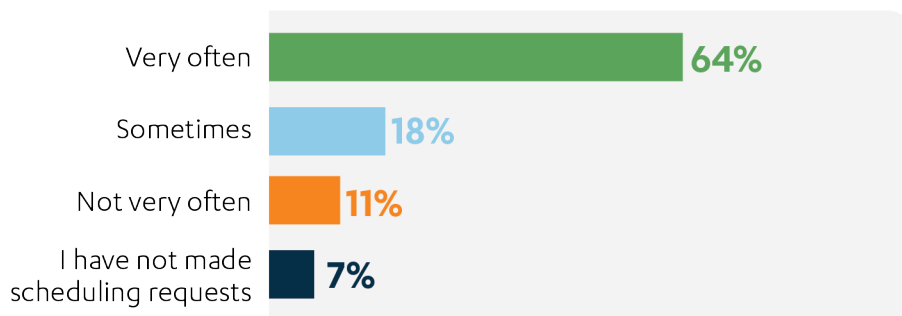


Figure 8: Expected to Be on Call on Days Off

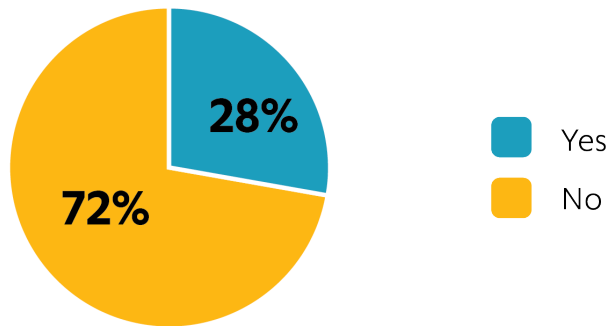
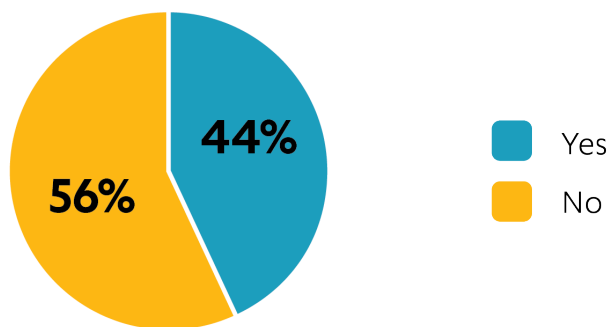


Figure 9: Asked to Complete a Task outside of Normal Work Responsibilities

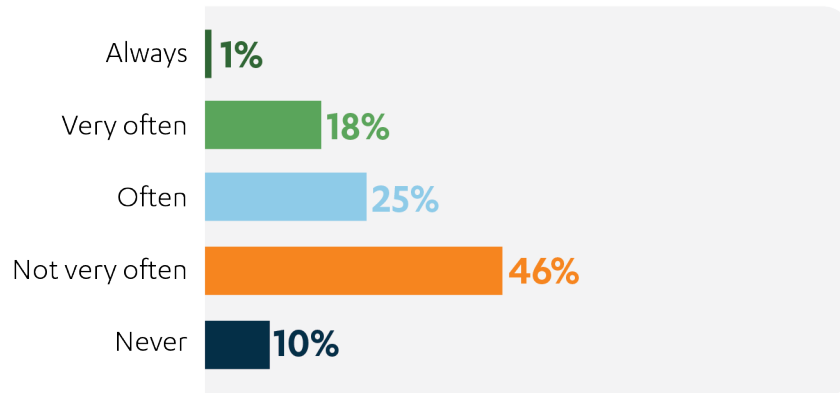


Given the increasing commitments that working learners are expected to take on at work, it is not surprising that many report several missed opportunities and an inability to maintain their responsibilities in school.

When it comes to choosing work over school, 25% report that they often have to choose work responsibilities over school, 18% report that they have to do so very often, and 1% report that they always have to.

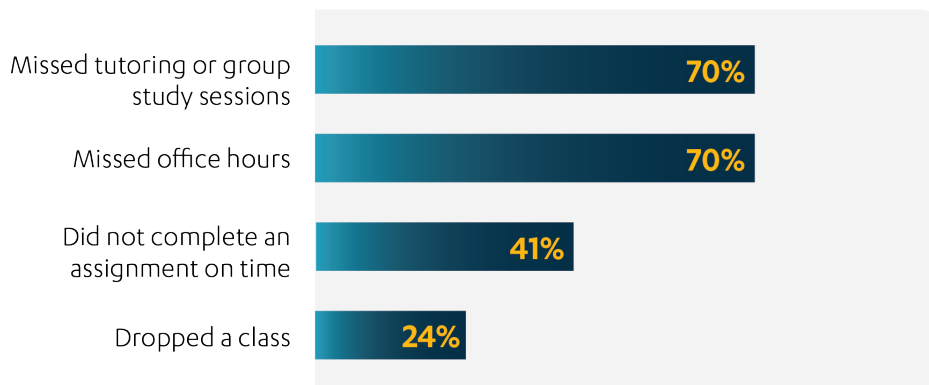
One UCLA student discussed the concessions they've had to make regarding their school schedule to better manage their work responsibilities: "I had to choose between work and school. I decided to just take one class, so I can manage both work and school. . . . I give preference to work" (Aucileia Rosa, personal communication, July 27, 2022).

Figure 10: Frequency of Choosing a Work Responsibility over a School Obligation



For those that do have to choose work over school, this can often lead to greater academic disengagement. Most (70%) working learners have missed office hours as well as opportunities for tutoring or collaborating with peers. Moreover, 41% of workers and learners reported that they did not complete a class assignment on time, with almost a quarter dropping a class due to work commitments.

Figure 11: Missed Educational Opportunities/Responsibilities due to Work Commitments



Across several interviews, workers and learners expressed difficulties in being able to attend office hours, which they reported helped them form more meaningful connections with their professors. Many workers and learners are unable to make proper use of the educational opportunities that are offered, which leaves some students feeling unprepared for their exams. One UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working in cleaning services stated:

Sometimes my work interferes when I'm preparing for a test, just because I cannot spend as much time preparing for my test. Working takes away time that I could be investing to prepare for the test. To do a more quality homework it's like everything is a rush just because I am trying to manage both. (Aucileia Rosa, personal communication, July 27, 2022)

Conversely, a CSU Northridge student majoring in social sciences and working as a day porter reported a missed work opportunity because of school. Unable to commit to a full-time work schedule, they were not able to receive a wage increase. When the worker and learner was asked if they had ever considered quitting school over their job, they stated:

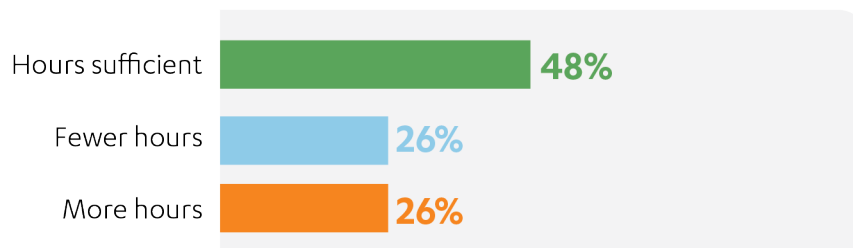
Yes, the company I work for had a new position open that required [me] to be full-time. . . . I really thought about it and wanted to apply since it came with a wage increase but ultimately decided not to do it . . ." (Kenia Pino, personal communication, August 10, 2022)

The lack of job-schedule flexibility is a challenge. For working learners that need the money to help pay for their basic living expenses, this often means dropping classes. One UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a case manager for a nonprofit expressed:

There were definitely some classes that I had to drop because I just could not fit it into the schedule, into my busy schedule, because I have to work 40 hours a week. There's no option for me to not work 40 hours a week, because if I don't work 40 hours, I won't have enough money for rent, I won't have enough for my bills, and I won't have enough for basically my living. So I have to work 40 hours. (Gyasti Averia, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

Although most working learners report that they work sufficient hours, many still feel the pressure to work more hours to ease the financial strain they're under. But at the same time, they need to work fewer hours to devote more time to their school responsibilities.

Figure 12: Preference for Working Hours



Furthermore, while working learners' primary jobs may have better scheduling flexibility for their schoolwork and help them gain some helpful communication skills (95%) and time management and organizational skills (89%), management opportunities (44%) and experiences that prepare them for their future careers (56%) remain limited. The reality is that most jobs that workers and learners are able to secure while they are in school provide little possibility for growth and upward mobility, with the majority reporting that they have not received any promotions (82%) or wage increases (63%).

Figure 13: Skills Gained from Primary Job

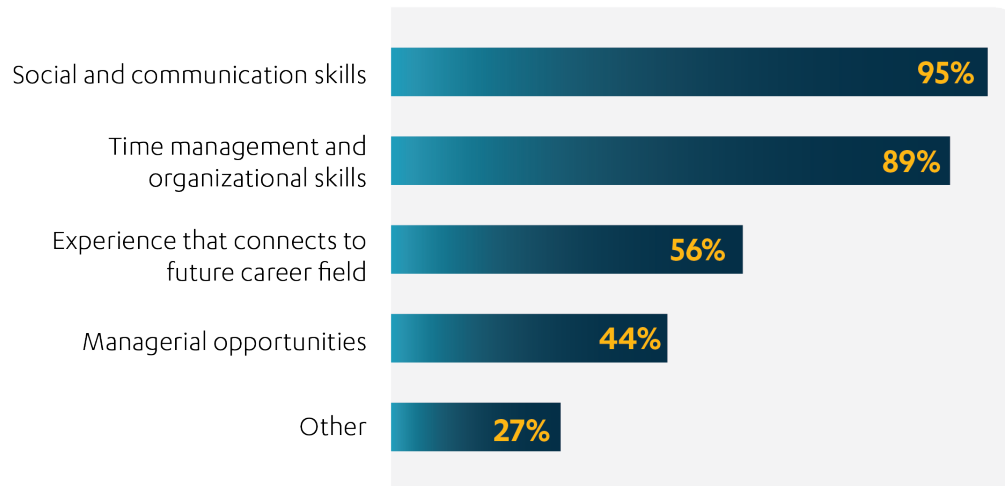


Figure 14: Promoted at Job

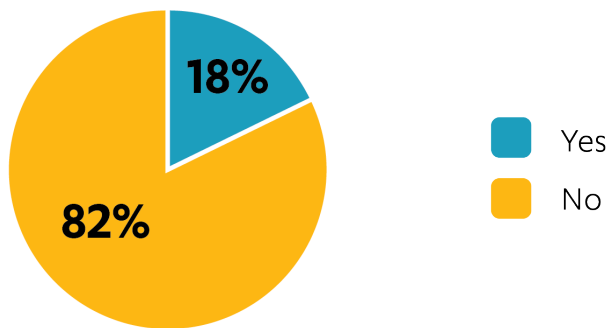
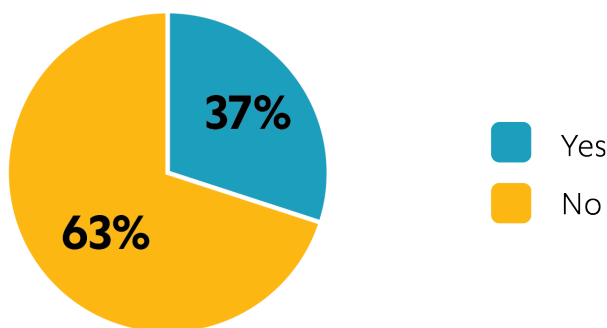


Figure 15: Received a Wage Increase



A Continued Need for Flexible Learning Practices

Prior research has found that workers and learners prefer flexible remote learning practices, particularly the ability to access recorded class lectures (Labor Summer Research Program Team 2020). This continues to be the case for the majority of workers, who prefer either asynchronous/self-paced online learning formats (50%) or hybrid classes (28%), with the least preferred formats being synchronous remote learning (12%) and in-person lectures (10%). While the data suggest that various instructional formats are being offered, asynchronous learning is the least offered instructional format (89%) when compared to hybrid classes (91%), synchronous remote learning (95%), and in-person lectures (95%). To help workers and learners balance their work and school, instructional formats need to remain flexible.

Figure 16: Type of Instructional Option That Would Best Help Balance Work and Education

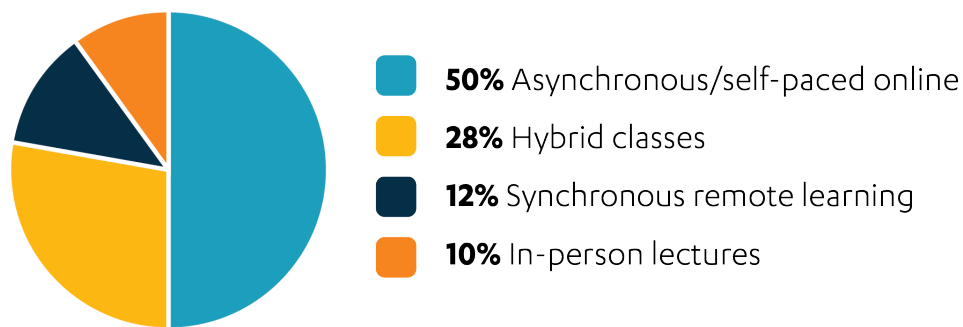


Figure 17: Types of Instructional Formats That the School Offers

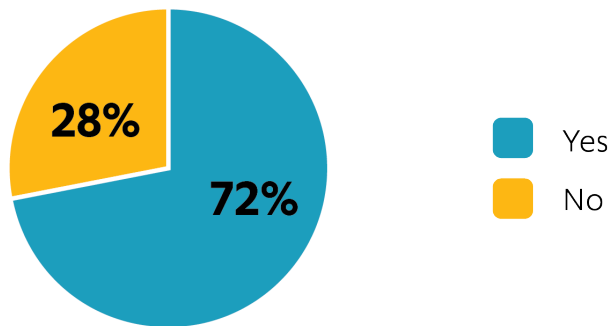


Similar sentiments were shared in our interviews, with one UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working in cleaning services discussing the ways that the university could better support workers and learners by “offering more on-line classes because this is easier to manage” (Aucileia Rosa, personal communication, July 27, 2022). Another UCLA student, majoring in visual and performing arts and working as a program assistant, described just how helpful asynchronous learning has been for them:

I think when I noticed the flexibility of classes was from first year. Like Fall 2020 when everything was virtual on purpose and all of my classes were asynchronous and it was really quite an accommodation. That's where I kind of really noticed, "Wow I needed this accommodation here." I had to kind of think back when I was working 40 hour weeks and having horrible bosses. So I needed to balance them in some way, and it was really accommodating. (Dorene Pilapandet, personal communication, July 30, 2022)

Additionally, many working learners are at a disadvantage when it comes to class selection and time, as most classes are offered during weekdays when they have to work. It is no surprise, then, that the majority of workers and learners (72%) would prefer to have more evening and weekend classes available.

Figure 18: Prefer to Have More Class Options Offered during the Evenings/Weekends



Flexible learning practices may be especially helpful for workers and learners that must commute. About half (45%) of workers and learners report moderate to high levels of difficulty regarding their daily commute. Further, more than two-fifths of working learners report that their class selection is impacted by their commute. It is not easy for workers and learners to find jobs that are flexible with their school schedule. Therefore, it is important to provide more options for asynchronous learning that can help them maintain their academic engagement through different modes.

Figure 19: Difficulty of Daily Commute

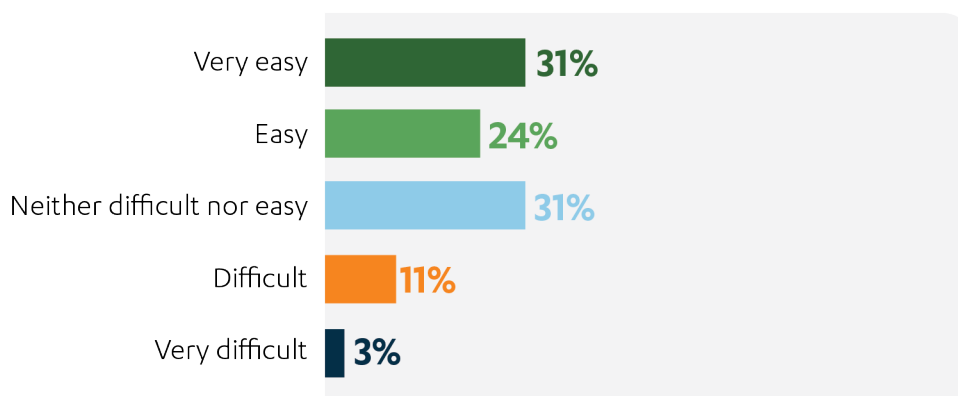
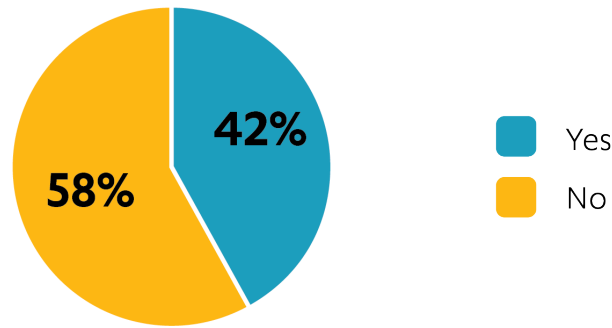


Figure 20: Class Selection Impacted by Commute



Organizing Workers and Learners

Another way that workers and learners seek to improve their working and learning conditions is through organizing efforts on campus and at work. Nearly 40% of working learners are somewhat or very engaged in student organizing efforts on campus. Further, more than half expressed interest in (52%) or were already a part of (3%) a labor union or workers' association.

Figure 21: Engagement in Student Organizing Efforts on Campus

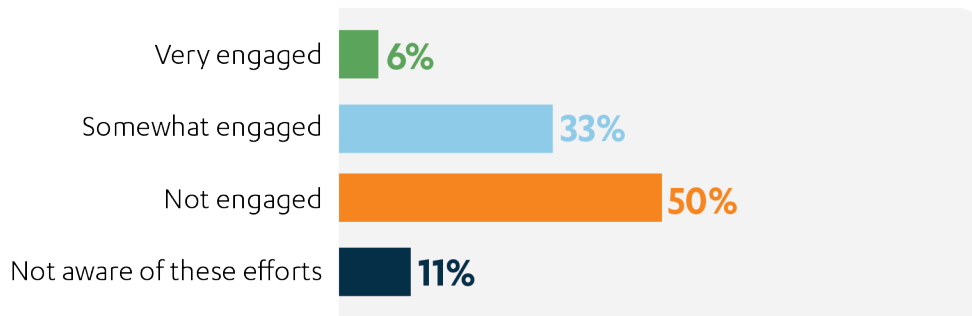
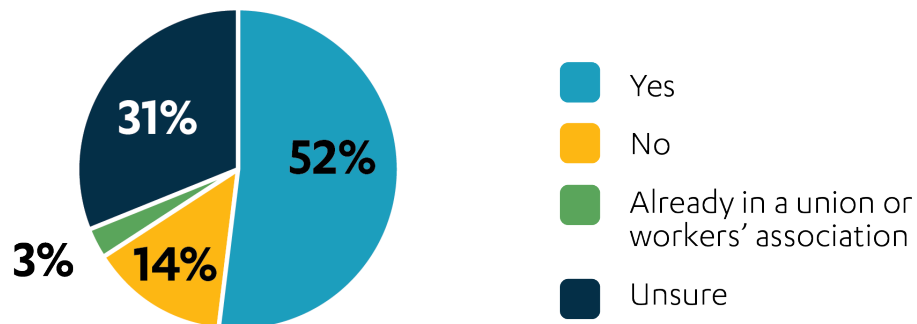


Figure 22: Interested in Joining a Labor Union or Workers' Association



Workers and learners recognize the value of having unions. Across interviews, working learners agreed that having a union would help increase worker power and rights and ensure that they are being treated fairly and equally on the job. One Mt. San Antonio College student majoring in social sciences and working as a student ambassador expressed:

I think there's a huge necessity for that. . . . I think having a union is more than valuable. And I would say just because it just allows workers to kind of negotiate what they believe, their rightful, their earned rights. You know, it's kind of a hard way to describe it, but I feel like in the end, workers should have a quality, considering how their employers may outrageously benefit from their work. (Jois Talla, personal communication, July 29, 2022)

More specifically, one Santa Monica College student majoring in health sciences and working as a style consultant discussed the importance of having the power of a union to help negotiate better wages for all employees:

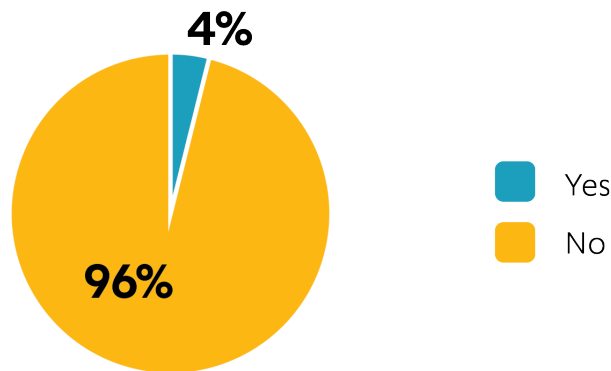
My current wage is \$17 per hour, and after a year of being with the company, or after yearly evaluations we are eligible to receive a 30 cent increase, which to me seems not enough with this inflation that we are about to experience. Now I am not complaining about my hourly wage because I am aware that other stores are paying their employees \$15 and my store was one of the "lucky ones." Maybe unionizing to get the hourly wage across all stores equal would be amazing. (Brenda Martinez, personal communication, August 2, 2022)

Despite increased interest in organizing, half of workers and learners reported not being engaged with any organizing efforts on campus. As one UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a case manager for a nonprofit suggests, getting more involved in organizing efforts may not be possible with their busy schedules.

I can't do that, I work on Saturdays from nine to six. There's no way I can make it to these protests and rallies. I'm sorry. So it kind of created this weird atmosphere between me and the organization... Because they never told me that I had to do it, they only told me that I had to make cold calls. That's what they wanted me to do, they wanted me to do cold calls and I was fine with that. But then they said that I had to go to rallies. ... and I was just like, "I can't you know I'm just too busy." (Gyasti Averia, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

Busy schedules can certainly get in the way of worker and learner engagement in organizing. Although our survey data showed that very few working learners (4%) worked for companies that held formal anti-union meetings or trainings, it is possible that there are other aspects of these companies' leadership and culture that may be anti-union.

Figure 23: Workplace Conducted Meetings or Trainings about Not Being Involved in a Union or Workers' Association

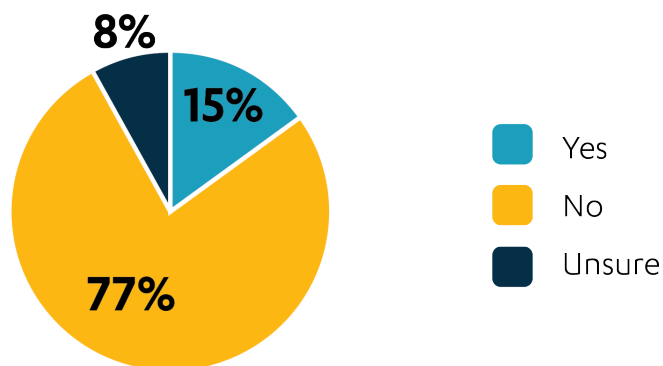


One UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a crew member in retail expressed the largely anti-union sentiment that their company shared and the numerous barriers in place that would make it difficult to form a union at their workplace:

I would like to join a union. I think it would be fun. And I think it'd be beneficial for my co-workers and I. . . I work at a company that is extremely anti-union. And there are a lot of roadblocks in the way to forming a union basically. (Iliana Levine, personal communication, July 28, 2022)

Barriers to supporting worker rights are fairly common. While many working learners would benefit from regular training and information on wage violations and theft, very few (15%) report receiving any such training or information.

Figure 24: Received Training and Information on Issues of Wage Theft



In addition, these barriers may prevent working learners from expressing their concerns around their working conditions. According to our data, less than a quarter (23%) actually discuss their concerns with their employer. This may be because of the negative consequences associated with bringing up the issues they have. Nearly one-third of working learners expressed concerns about getting fired, being reprimanded, or having their work hours reduced if they brought up issues in the workplace.

Figure 25: Brought Up Concerns or Issues (e.g., Working Conditions, Safety) to Their Employer

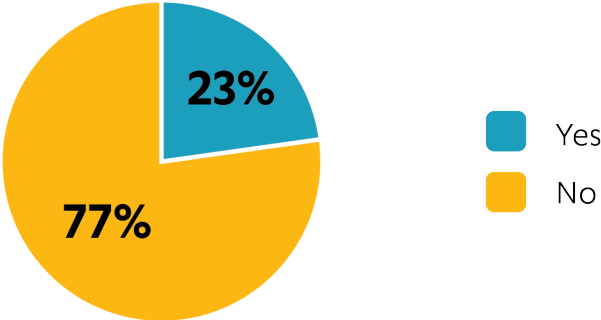
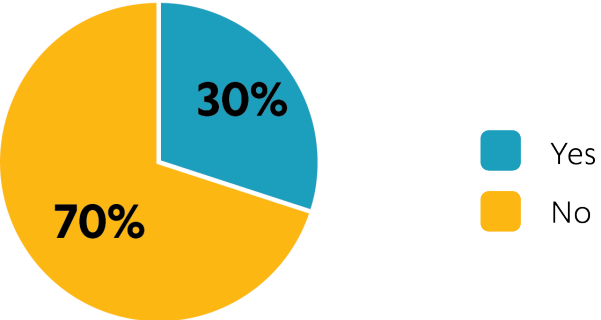


Figure 26: Concerned about Bringing Up Issues in the Workplace because of Negative Consequences (e.g., Getting Fired, Being Reprimanded, Having Work Hours Reduced)



2. Finances: Fighting for Basic Needs Amid Rising Costs

Attending higher education institutions can lead to promising professional futures, but the road to success can be expensive. With the steady increase in the cost of tuition and inflation, many Los Angeles County students tend to work long hours to cover their financial obligations. Workers and learners are not receiving enough institutional financial support, and those that do receive some still need to work to cover basic living expenses, especially as costs continue to rise.

Financial Aid Is Not Enough

For many students, financial aid serves as an important resource that provides them with the opportunity to go to school without having to work, but it's often not enough to support working learners' financial needs. The majority (91%) of working learners applied for financial aid, demonstrating a high need among this group. However, less than half (49%) received a Pell Grant, which is a form of federal financial aid that helps low-income students cover educational expenses such as tuition, fees, and room and board.

Figure 27: Applied for Financial Aid

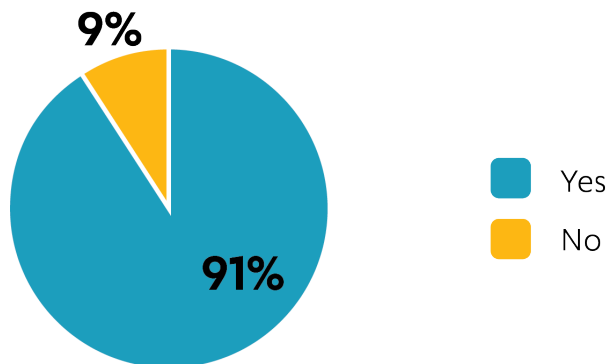
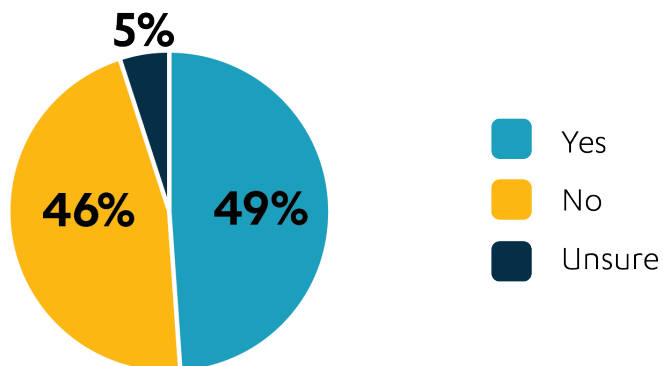


Figure 28: Recipient of a Pell Grant



Given that the majority of working learners (77%) make less than \$15,000 a year, it is clear that they could use greater institutional financial support. However, the burden of proving financial need among working learners is high and does not reflect their financial reality. Many working learners (72%) must claim dependent status even if they receive little to no financial support from their families.

Figure 29: Personal Income in the Past Year

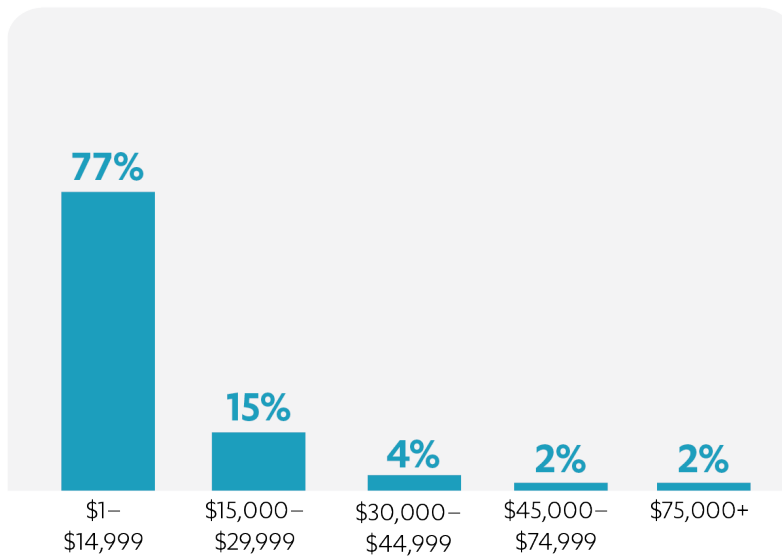
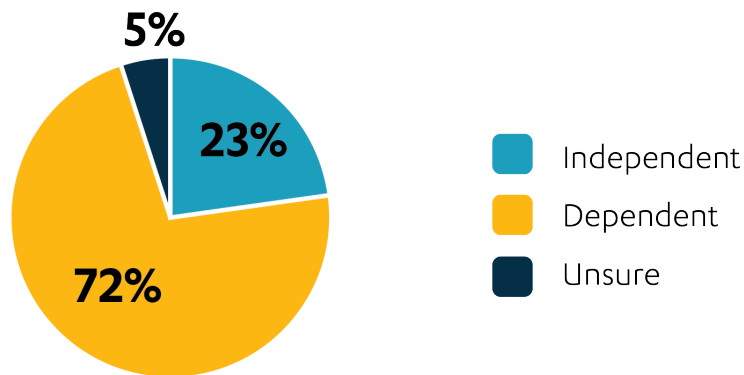


Figure 30: Dependency Status for FAFSA



Even when working learners receive institutional financial support, it can be easily taken away. One UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a crew member in retail expressed their frustrations over losing their grant when their parent’s income was deemed too high to show financial need:

I got a Cal Grant that paid for my tuition, basically, which was great because nobody in my family saved any money for me to go to college or anything like that. And they don't have the money to spend on college. And then recently, I filed my FAFSA and they said your mother makes too much money. She has too much in assets, we're not giving you this grant anymore, go **** yourself. And I was a bit upset by that and stressed out by that and when I looked at the breakdown, they were like, okay, your mother makes \$83,000 a year, therefore her contribution was either \$23,000 or \$29,000 a year to my education. So in what ***** world is like, basically a third of my parent's income, like just readily available for me to write a check to my school. (Iliana Levine, personal communication, July 28, 2022)

The requirements for maintaining financial aid can add additional strain for workers and learners. Another student from UCLA, majoring in social sciences and working as a case manager in the nonprofit sector, expressed concerns over losing their financial aid if they did not maintain the required 12 units per term:

Yeah so I am required to at least have the 12 units for financial aid. There's no option to have less units, because if I don't have at least 12 I will not get financial aid, and that means that I won't have money for rent or anything so I have to do 12 units. (Gyasti Averia, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

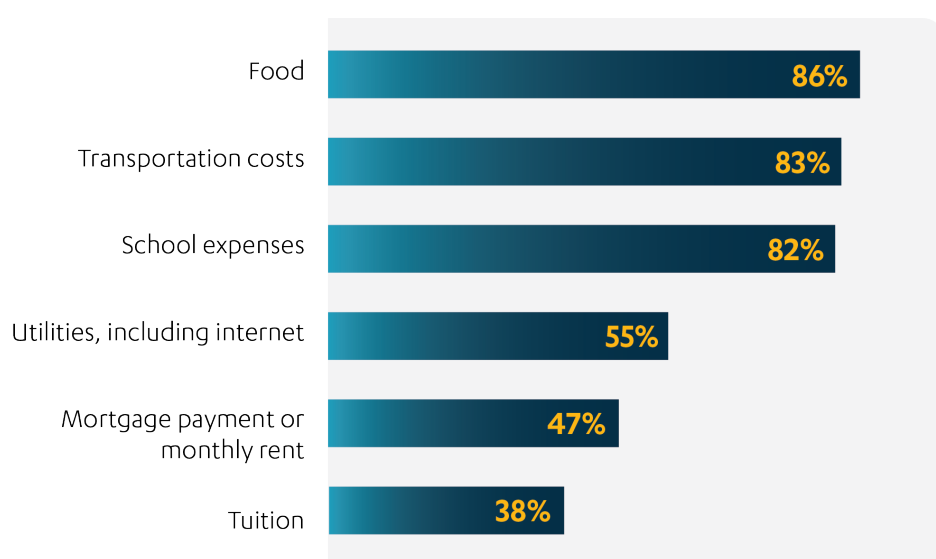
Financial aid requirements consider only what is important to maintain student status, and neglect the reality that maintaining a full course load while also having to work 20 hours a week or more is not feasible for many workers and learners. Yet many working learners have no choice but to take on the additional stress of meeting all the financial aid requirements to demonstrate they are worthy of the support they deserve. Moreover, even if workers and learners are able to receive support from their families, it is not always easy. In fact, it can be an added stressor for them when they work so hard to be independent. One student at Santa Monica College majoring in health sciences and working as a style consultant said:

I like to be very independent and I don't like to ask for help, because I like to earn my money. If I don't have enough, it takes a lot of courage to really ask my parents for help, so I try not to stress about finances, because I know my parents are there to assist me, but sometimes the stress gets to me. I just remind myself that my parents are willing to support me. (Brenda Martinez, personal communication, August 2, 2022)

Working to Cover Basic Needs

Workers and learners that receive some financial assistance to cover the costs of their tuition and fees still do not have enough to afford basic living expenses. When asked about what they spent their paychecks on, most working learners reported basic necessities, including food (86%), transportation costs (83%), school expenses (82%), and utilities (55%).

Figure 31: Expenses Covered with Each Paycheck



Across several interviews, workers and learners said it was necessary for them to find jobs, because financial aid was simply not enough. A UCLA student majoring in STEM and working as a cashier shared:

I ran out of the savings that I had before I started working so I just want to be able to have money to spend without having to take from my parents, so I had to find a job just for small things like textbooks, things like that—things that my financial aid wasn't covering. (Daniel Ray, personal communication, July 27, 2022)

A CSU Northridge student majoring in social sciences and working as an elementary school teacher's assistant discussed how easy it is for various living and school expenses to add up:

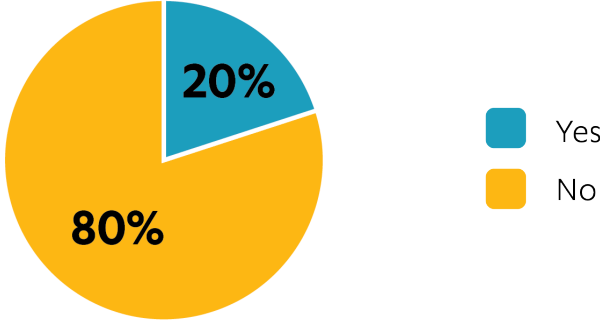
Definitely the books. They're just so expensive, especially sociology books for some reason haha. And the parking passes along with gas. I had to commute to school but I have a car which needs gas obviously and it all kinda just adds up to be really expensive. (Victor Covarrubias, personal communication, July 28, 2022)

For another worker and learner, a Santa Monica College student majoring in social sciences and working as a style consultant, it is important to place things into perspective and remind themselves that the struggles they experience are only temporary:

I think it's just very tough, and I don't have the luxury of not working. I have to work in order to pay my bills and keep going to school. It can be stressful at times, and there have been times when I wanted to take a semester or even an entire year off, but I always remind myself that the reward is greater than the sacrifice. This is only a temporary situation in which I find myself. (Brenda Martinez, personal communication, August 2, 2022)

Without necessary financial support, one-fifth of workers and learners have had to make difficult decisions to skip meals.

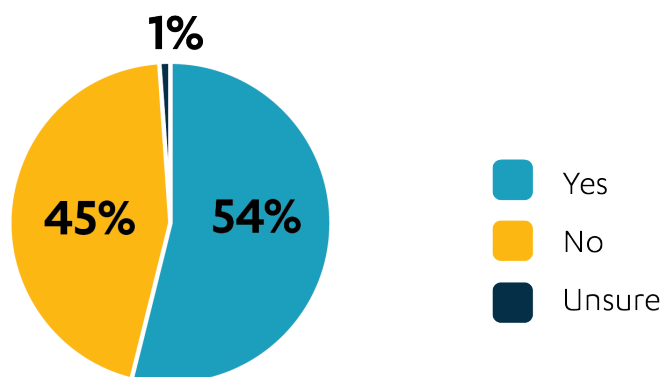
Figure 32: Skipped Meals in the Last Week due to Financial Reasons



Inflation and the Rising Cost of Living

Unfortunately, the struggle to pay for basic living expenses has only gotten harder for working learners as the impact of inflation and rising costs is being especially hard felt. In particular, more than half (54%) of working learners reported experiencing challenges in paying for their basic necessities due to inflation.

Figure 33: Experienced Challenges Paying for Basic Necessities due to Inflation



Similar concerns about rising costs were shared across interviews. A Pasadena City College student majoring in social sciences and working as a special education paraprofessional is mindful of not making enough to afford the high gas prices:

I am definitely more concerned if things continue to go up in price, especially gas and since I am a commuter. Always having that fear of what if I don't make enough? Especially because I don't work during the summer since it's a school. So, my savings, not having enough money saved for that. (Jessica Birrueta, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

A UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a crew member in retail discussed their hesitation over buying certain foods that are now more expensive, something they didn't previously worry about:

I guess. Just because being in college, I don't have a lot of money. I don't think most of us do. But now it's like, there's like certain food that's like, too expensive now. Before, I didn't really budget with food, I just kind of got whatever I wanted, because it's literally food. But now there's more hesitation to buy certain products just because they're also expensive. (Iliana Levine, personal communication, July 28, 2022)

Working learners are not just covering their own basic needs. A UCLA student majoring in social sciences and working as a student counselor discussed how they are also working so they can help to support their family members, who are also struggling with rising costs:

As a student I still have my responsibilities, my family, ones that I still have to obviously fulfill, so making sure that I'm able to not only sustain myself, but help aid my parents, especially in today's economy where prices are just soaring at an all-time high. (Nicklas Paul Singh, personal communication, August 4, 2022)

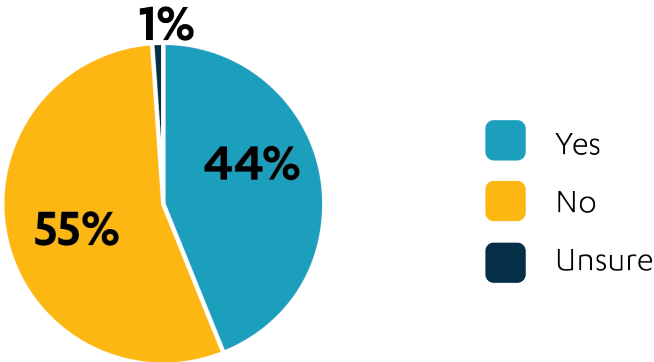
3. Worker and Learner Mental Health and Well-Being

Meeting the demands of both school and work remains a stressful endeavor for workers and learners, especially as so many struggle to secure enough financial support to cover school and basic living expenses. Not surprisingly, workers and learners struggle to prioritize mental health over school and work and lack time to engage in self-care. Unfortunately, workers and learners that try to access mental health services and other campus resources often encounter barriers.

Barriers to Mental Health Support

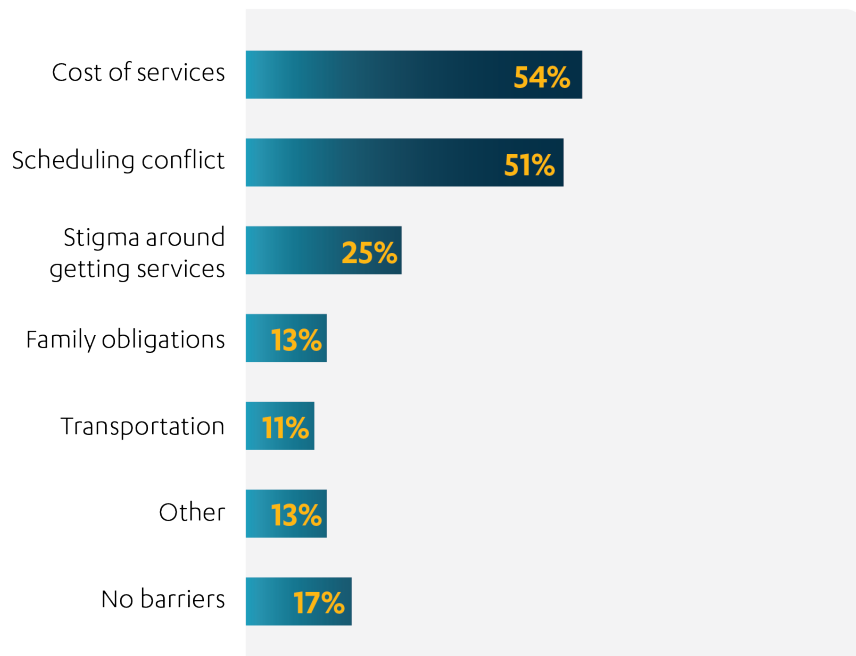
For workers and learners, accessing mental health services is an important step toward improving their mental health and well-being. This is especially important because prior reports have found that stress and mental health needs are high among workers and learners (Ángeles et al. 2020; Labor Summer Research Program Team 2020). Despite high mental health needs, more than half (55%) of workers and learners report that they have not sought mental health services.

Figure 34: Sought Mental Health Services



Working learners’ decision not to see mental health may be attributed to the perceived barriers to obtaining mental health services, with more than half of workers and learners reporting concerns over the cost of services and scheduling conflicts. Additionally, a quarter reported concerns over the stigma around utilizing mental health services. These findings are consistent with previous research on mental health stigma among college students, with one study highlighting campus-specific concerns, such as institutional mistrust and limited awareness of available services (McSpadden 2022).

Figure 35: Perceived Barriers to Obtaining Mental Health Services



Workers and learners at UCLA are able to receive mental health services through Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)—however, their experiences with CAPS are not always the most helpful. A few workers and learners reported having poor experiences with CAPS, which prevented them from using the service. One UCLA student majoring in visual and performing arts and working as a program assistant stated:

CAPS is kind of useless and that’s why I haven’t really used it. I went there looking for a psychiatrist and stuff...But the whole process was a pain-in-the-* ... So they’re just not helpful and they’re not good. So that’s why I haven’t really dealt with them. (Dorene Pilapandet, personal communication, July 30, 2022)**

Similarly, another worker and learner at UCLA, who is majoring in STEM and working in food service, noted that the challenges of navigating mental health care through CAPS (e.g., needing an easier way to set up an appointment with a mental health counselor) were a major barrier to accessing mental health services.

I feel like one of the biggest obstacles to actually utilizing them is definitely just understanding, where, when and how to access them. For instance, if there were an easier sort of . . . step by step guide to actually accessing an appointment with a professional mental health counselor with the CAPS Center in an easily accessible place on the UCLA student website or anything like that, then I think that would definitely make it easier for a lot of students to access it. (Sarah Z. Huang, personal communication, July 25, 2022)

Self-Care Comes Last

The barriers that workers and learners encounter in seeking mental health support can further limit their ability to attend to their mental health needs and engage in self-care. In fact, the majority of workers and learners (82%) report that they often or sometimes have to put aside their mental health needs. About 92% of workers and learners report that they often or sometimes prioritize school over mental health needs, while 74% report that they often or sometimes prioritize work over mental health needs.

Table 1: Frequency of Putting Aside or Prioritizing School or Work over Mental Health

	Putting Aside Mental Health Needs	Prioritizing School over Mental Health Needs	Prioritizing Work over Mental Health Needs
Often	49%	63%	45%
Sometimes	33%	29%	29%
Rarely	14%	4%	21%
Never	4%	4%	5%

The inability to engage in self-care can take a toll on one’s mental health. That was the case for a worker and learner at Pasadena City College majoring in social sciences and working as a case manager at a nonprofit, who felt that not being able to rest and get proper sleep affected their mental health:

I feel that not having time for any self-care and constantly being on the go definitely is affecting my mental health. I feel that I am constantly on adrenaline, and I don't have time to sit down and just relax. I always feel behind on everything in life. I feel that I'm nowhere, I'm just running on a treadmill, and not getting anywhere, and not having a moment to sit down and rest, and really process everything in. So, yeah, breaking out, hair falling off, pimples, stress eating, and insomnia. All of that is hitting. (Jessica Birrueta, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

Similar trends emerged across other interviews, with other workers and learners reporting not having enough time to engage in self-care and being constantly sleep deprived. A worker and learner at CSU Long Beach majoring in social sciences and working as a lash technician discussed the increasing stress, tension, and depression they feel when they are unable to go to the gym because of school and work:

For my self care I [go to the gym] . . . which is . . . very relaxing [for me]. I feel like I don't think about anything else except for working out at that moment so I like to go to the gym 'cause I'm zoning out, but because of work [and] school I always skip it. . . . I usually go three times a week instead of five times a week that I would like to go, sometimes I even go through a whole week without going to the gym and I think those weeks are very much . . . I'm very much tense, I'm very much stressed out, sometimes I get really depressed about it." (Regina Estrada, personal communication, August 2, 2022)

Despite having to prioritize responsibilities related to school (41%) and work (38%), workers and learners would prefer to prioritize their self-care (29%), followed by networking with peers and faculty (22%) and preparing for post-graduation (21%).

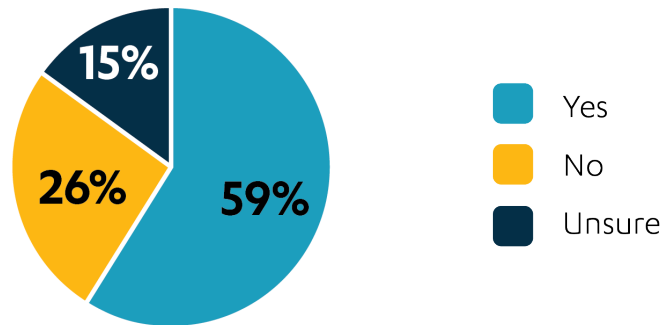
Table 2: Actual versus Desired Priorities

	Current Priorities	Desired Priorities
Completing homework on time	41%	19%
Securing income through employment	38%	9%
Engaging in self-care	11%	29%
Preparing for post-graduation	5%	21%
Networking with peers and faculty	5%	22%

Access to and Awareness of Resources

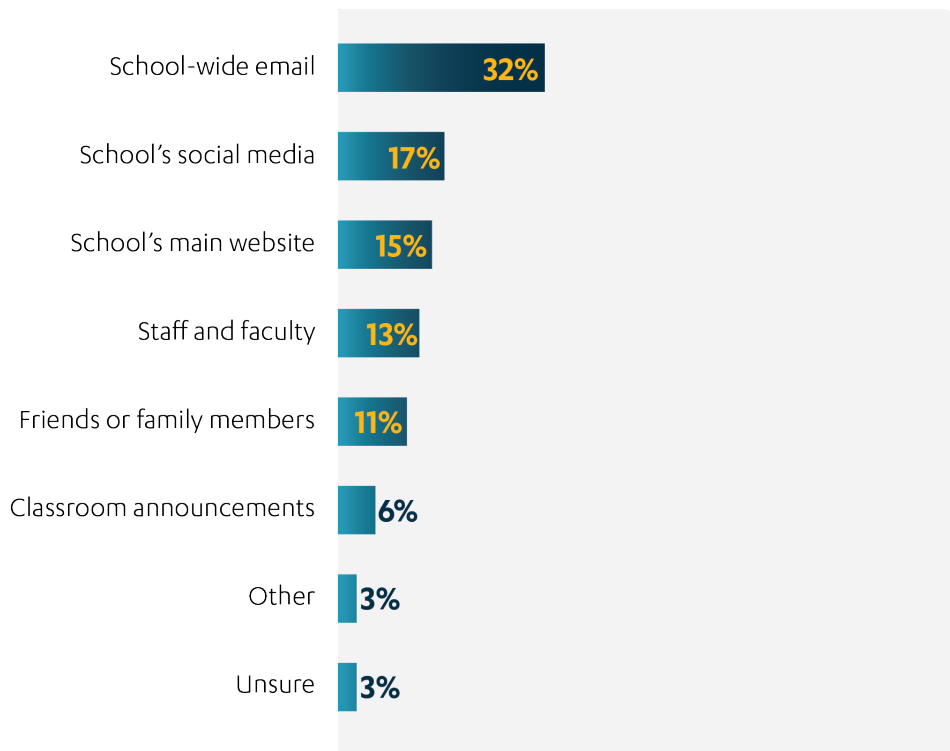
Providing greater access to campus resources and spreading awareness around what is available can be an important step toward better supporting worker and learner mental health and well-being. Although the majority of students (59%) are aware of resources on campus that can support workers and learners, more than a quarter are still unaware of the resources that can better support them.

Figure 36: Aware of Campus Resources to Assist Workers and Learners



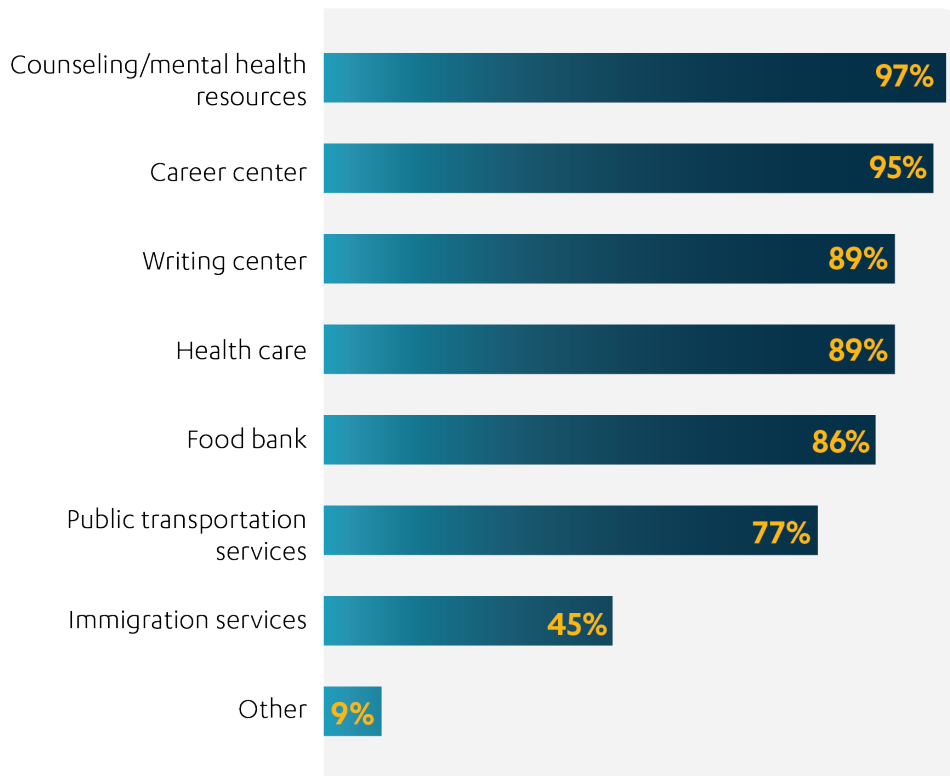
Workers and learners receive information regarding on-campus resources through various channels, with school-wide emails (32%), school social media (17%), and school websites (15%) being their preferred platforms.

Figure 37: Best Platform to Receive Information about On-Campus Resources



Having multiple platforms through which to receive information about on-campus resources appears to be helpful, as workers and learners report that they are aware of a variety of resources on campus, including counseling / mental health resources (97%), career centers (95%), writing centers (89%), health care (89%), and food banks (86%).

Figure 38: Awareness of Various Campus Resources



Acknowledging the variety of resources available to them, some workers and learners, including a Santa Monica College student majoring in health sciences and working as a style consultant, report overall satisfaction with the notification and availability of on-campus resources:

Resources are very accessible. They offer rentals on library books, computers, hotspots and tutoring as well. They also keep us informed of events that are happening, that have free goodies. We have a food closet that is kept stocked for those that may need a snack or even ingredients to cook a meal at home. I think my campus keeps us updated on what resources we have access to in the best way possible. (Brenda Martinez, personal communication, August 2, 2022)

In addition, across interviews, several workers and learners indicated that their access to the campus food bank is especially helpful, as it is often stocked with food they enjoy, has a variety of items, and provides necessary access to meals they can't always afford. A CSU Northridge student majoring in visual and performing arts and working as a server discussed how the food bank helped them manage their meals throughout their day:

Yeah definitely the food pantry because sometimes it was very difficult to eat and afford rent and all that so I wouldn't be getting enough food. What I used to do, actually, is the restaurant will provide one small free meal, like a bowl of rice and then that would be one of two meals of the day. And for the second meal, basically in the editing bay of my school there's a big food pantry—just take whatever you need—for students who can't afford anything. I'll just grab some pasta and stuff and that'll be my second meal of the day. (Otis Wheeler, personal communication, August 4, 2022)

However, not all workers and learners are able to benefit from on-campus resources equally. Workers and learners that have to commute, as well as ones that simply do not have the time because of their school and work schedules, are least likely to access resources, even if they are aware of them. This was the case for one CSU Northridge student majoring in social sciences and working as a secretary at a law firm:

Even if there [were] . . . resources that the school provided I would probably not even have had time to use it. So even if I want it and even if they have the resources there's just no time in the day for me to be able to get any type of resources. (Judith Vazquez-Oropeza, personal communication, July 31, 2022)

One way to further support workers and learners is to help ensure that they have a way to get what they need. However, according to our findings, many (60%) do not know of ways to submit campus concerns or are unsure of whether they know how. This lack of knowledge may further reflect why the majority (81%) of workers and learners have not submitted their concerns to campus.

Figure 39: Knowledge of Ways to Submit Campus Concerns

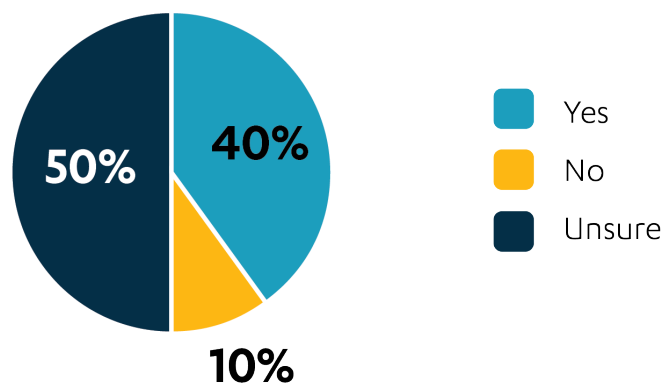
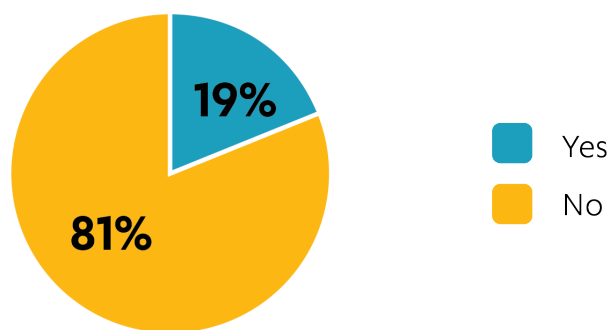


Figure 40: Submitted Concerns to Campus



Recommendations

To dismantle the structural and everyday challenges that workers and learners face, there are three target audiences—students, faculty/administrators, and educational policymakers—that we hope to reach with this research so they can use their power to better advocate for workers and learners. It's important to note that students and faculty/administrators must work collaboratively to influence the change needed in the legislative sector. The following are our specific recommendations for improving working and learning conditions for workers and learners.

1. Student Level

- a. Communicate with your counselors, faculty, and peers for information. It is imperative that as students we always reach out for help when we need it. More often than not, there are going to be numerous resources available to you, so always make sure that you are communicating with those around you. Your peers might be in similar positions as you and aware of certain opportunities, such as transportation perks or where food is being served on campus.
- b. Share your story. As workers and learners, we all have stories to share. It can be liberating and validating to hear that you are not the only one. It can also feel really easy to isolate yourself at a big institution that can sometimes lead to a sense of impostor syndrome. However, know that you are doing more than enough, and always give yourself space to share your experiences as a worker and learner.

2. Faculty/Administration Level

- a. Make improvements to hybrid and asynchronous learning environments. To empower student workers to take charge of their school and work schedules, structural changes must be implemented within the classroom. Schools should invest in technology in and out of the classroom for remote and hybrid learning. Workers and learners often rely on remote learning for its flexibility, which allows them to accommodate their work schedules and extracurricular activities. Thus, it is imperative that the quality of instruction and classroom engagement is equal to that of traditional modes of learning as much as possible.
- b. Implement working-learner training for faculty to better support working learners, and create educational workshops for workers and learners. To implement meaningful changes on behalf of working learners, professors and teaching assistants need to have a firm grasp on the realities of being a working learner. A syllabus and teaching philosophy that incorporates more flexible deadlines and hybrid lectures and encourages open communication between student and teacher would be beneficial for working-learner education. Educational institutions should mandate a course that illustrates the realities, demographics, and decisions that affect workers and learners. It is also important that workers and learners are aware of what resources and rights they are entitled to.

3. Educational Policymaker Level

- a. Make mental health services accessible/affordable for all students. As a society (and as an institution), we need to take steps to address burnout and other mental health issues. Due to ever-shifting schedules and a full plate of responsibilities, workers and learners are constantly forced to budget their time. It is a disservice to them to not actively provide them with affordable and accessible mental health care. No student should ever have to run out of counseling sessions or have to pay an expensive bill for reaching out for help. More funding needs to be provided for mental health programs at schools, including additional funding to hire more staff to handle the demand for mental health services from students.
- b. Expand eligibility for FAFSA recipients. One of the biggest challenges for a majority of all students aiming to obtain a higher education is how expensive tuition has grown over the years. The FAFSA has created several caps/limitations for students to receive federal aid. It makes the assumption that the expected family contribution (EFC) will be covered, when in many situations that is not the case. Therefore, the socioeconomic status brackets for who qualifies for federal aid should be expanded, allowing for more students to be eligible for certain grants. Additionally, there shouldn't be an assumption that students' families will help pay for their education, so students under the age of 24 should be allowed to claim themselves as independents on their FAFSA without having to file additional paperwork for a "special circumstance," which in many cases can be a strenuous and long process.

- c. Increase the pay scale for all on-campus jobs, and ensure that there are more jobs related to worker and learner majors and career fields. Workers and learners should have the opportunity to gain fieldwork experience based on what they are learning. Some students find additional work on-campus due to insufficient wages or a cap on work hours allowable at their campus jobs. However, many off-campus jobs end up being low-wage service positions that are not related to their majors or future career fields. Thus, all campuses should offer a greater variety of jobs on campus that provide important career-field experience and better pay.

Appendix A: Background on Survey Respondents

Table A1: Percentage of Surveys Collected per College System

University of California (UC)	65%
California State University (CSU)	21%
California Community Colleges (CCC)	14%

Table A2: College Majors

Social Sciences	41%
STEM	38%
Humanities	9%
Health	9%
Education	7%
Visual and performing arts	5%
Applied technology	1%
Other	5%

Table A3: Job Industries

Education/university	39%
Food service/restaurant/bars	13%
Health care	13%
Retail/grocery	10%
Finance/insurance/real estate/law	5%
Government/nonprofit	4%
Technology services	3%
Hotels/hospitality	3%
Delivery/warehouse	3%
Arts/entertainment	3%
Other	4%

Table A4: Occupation

Frontline worker	76%
Office worker	22%
Supervisor	2%

Table A5: Age

18–24	91%
25–45	8%
46 and older	1%

Table A6: Gender

Female	61%
Male	26%
Cis female	8%
Cis male	1%
Nonbinary, gender fluid, genderqueer, agender	3%
Transmasculine	1%

Table A7: Race/Ethnicity

Latinx or Hispanic	47%
White	15%
Asian	13%
Multiracial	9%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	7%
SWANA (Middle Eastern/Southwest Asian/North African)	7%
Black or African American	2%

Table A8: Have children

No	3%
Yes	97%

Appendix B: Acknowledgments

This report took a great deal of time and dedication from all parties, so we want to thank everyone who assisted and supported this project. We also want to dedicate this report to all the industrious workers and learners. We hope this report brings more support and resources to them.

Thank you to the Labor Summer Research Program 2022 cohort, who led the research project, collected and analyzed the surveys and interviews, and provided the data used in this report, as well as the infographics that were used at our Workers and Learners Summit.

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