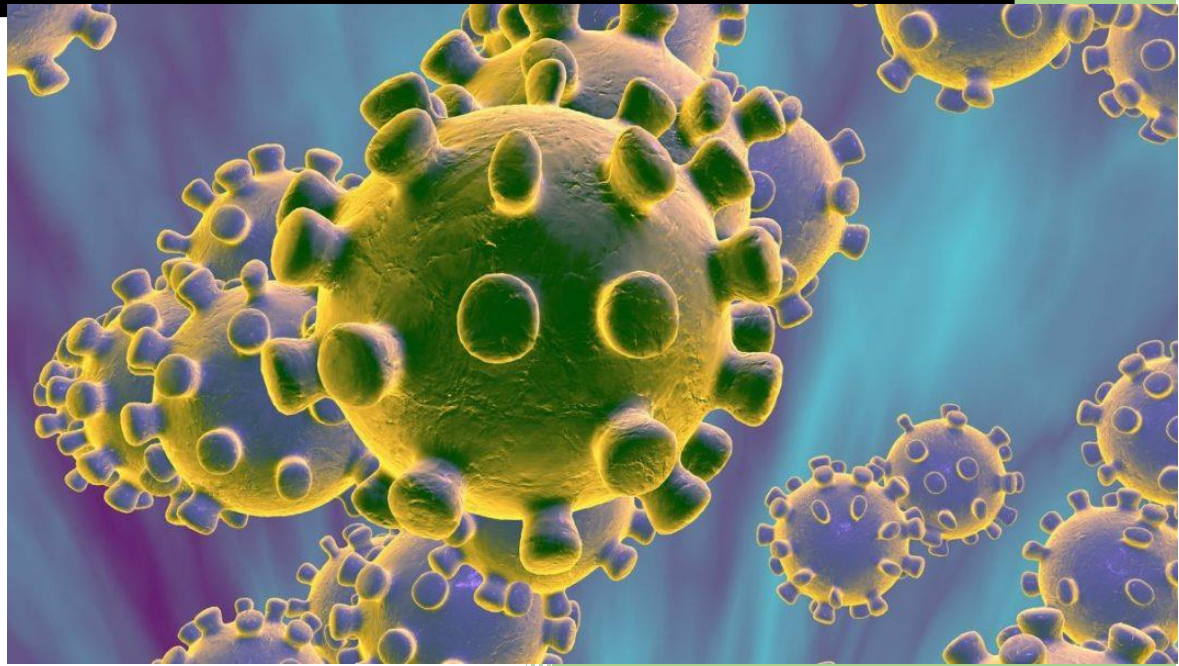


2020

Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis on the MxCC Community

With a Focus on Food Insecurity and Six Students



Trenton Wright, Coord. of Institutional
Advancement, CECD, CFRE, MFB Site
Supervisor Kimberly Howley, Human
Services Field Placement Student
The Magic Food Bus
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Introduction

The spring semester of 2020 began as so many semesters had before. Students enrolled in traditional, online and hybrid classes. They purchased their textbooks and attended to their course work. Some spent time together in the café, the student lounge, the game room or outdoors around campus. Two months into the semester and the world was a different place. The students, staff and faculty of Middlesex Community College (MxCC) needed to adjust quickly to the circumstances and conditions of a new and pervasive respiratory viral infection, COVID-19. Meetings and gatherings were cancelled or moved to a virtual format. Classes were continued but from a distance. Campus, local school facilities and some businesses were closed. Families were confined to their homes. There were new technologies and new platforms to be learned. Food became difficult to procure. Some products such as cleaning supplies, paper products, dairy and meat became scarce on the grocery store shelves. Social distancing measures were put in place to prevent the spread of the infection and keep the demand for hospital services to a manageable level.

These same social distancing measures took an emotional toll. People were unable to see their family members and friends in the traditional ways. Hospital patients and residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities were unable to receive visitors. People grieved alone. Mothers labored alone. People were frightened. Information shifted and news flowed at a breakneck pace. In the midst of difficult times, neighbors stepped up. Companies adjusted their business models. Government agencies and private nonprofit organizations filled gaps to provide support and make this new way of life manageable.

This report examines the effect COVID-19 had on the MxCC community at-large; how students adjusted to online learning and provided for themselves and their families. It looks at the effect COVID-19 had on the food supply, especially for those who are most vulnerable. As society became more comfortable with social distancing measures and school closures, governments, universities, colleges, and community members began to plan for the future, a way of life that most likely will look quite different than January 2020.

Note: This report began when both human service college interns needed additional contact hours to complete their internships. When the college shut down began, both interns had completed only about 55% of their required 110 internship hours with the Magic Food Bus (MFB). The online collaborative report work began in one of the most difficult academic and social circumstances in American history. Existing student workers were permitted to continue working under federal financial aid through the spring semester if they could complete work remotely. Six student workers were assigned weekly logs completed over seven weeks. The student work included: pictures of food shopping, home pictures involving distance learning or food preparation, personal stories of the pandemic impact on student life, social distancing difficulties, and replies to a series of questions. Student work was forwarded to Ms. Howley for review and inclusion into the report. At about the three-quarter mark of the internship, one intern withdrew, leaving a significant burden of additional work for Ms. Howley to complete.

Food security on college and university campuses

Food insecurity defined

Food insecurity is defined as the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable and nutritious food. According to Feeding America, 15 million households, of which 6 million had children, were food insecure. Nearly 1 in 5 African American and 1 in 6 Latino households are food insecure. These households are often experiencing unemployment and poverty. People living in poverty are disproportionately children, persons living with a disability or with high medical expenses. (Feeding America, 2018). According to the Brookings Institution, 1 in 5 families with children experience food insecurity; 85% are headed by an adult who works. Food insecurity results in an estimated \$77.5 billion in additional healthcare costs. (JAMA, 2020)

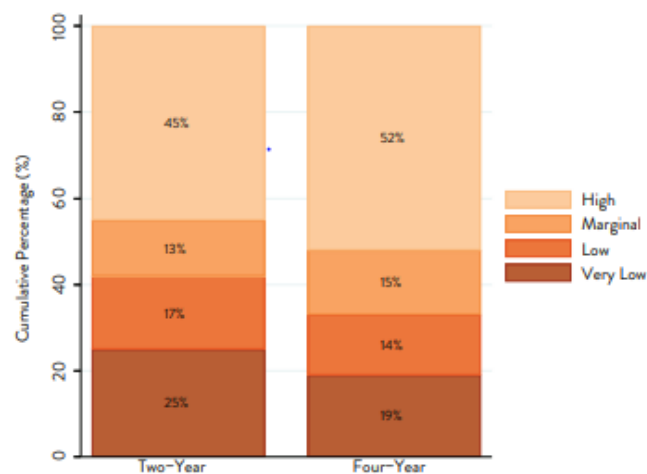
Who is affected by college food insecurity and the Inconvenient Numbers?

Federal data from 2016 shows that the average college student was 26 years of age and approximately half of the undergraduates were financially independent. Twenty-two percent

had dependent children of their own. Fourteen percent of those parents were single parents. (Smith, 2019) A 2018 national study from the Urban Institute found that 17% of households with a community college student experienced food insecurity.

According to 2019 data from the “5th Annual Real College Survey” conducted by Sara Goldrick Rab, 40% of the 330,000 student survey respondents from more than 400 colleges and universities were affected by food insecurity within the previous 30 days. Nearly half were affected by housing insecurity and 16% reported being homeless during the previous year. Estimates were higher for community college students. (Strauss, 2020) The Urban Institute along with the Brookings Institute found that during the economic recession of 2008 and through 2014, approximately 21% of community college households indicated they could not access proper food all of the time. (Bauer-Wolf, 2017)

Food Security Among Survey Respondents by Sector



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

The effects of food insecurity







Food insecurity can lead to chronic health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. In children, food insecurity can lead to poor health, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, developmental and behavioral problems including aggression, depression, anxiety, and attention deficit disorder. These risk factors increase the likelihood of poor school performance. (Black, 2012) The U.S. Government Accountability Office’s 2018 report of food

insecurity states that evidence indicates food insecurity can negatively impact a college student's academic success. A reduction in food insecurity leads to better academic success and a well-educated labor force. (Strauss, 2020)

Reasons and possible solutions to combat food insecurity

Reasons for student food insecurities include financial aid lagging behind the cost of living and the hesitancy of employers to hire students with complicated schedules due to college classes. Some solutions to these insecurities include meal voucher programs, subsidized housing, greater Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and emergency financial aid. (Strauss, 2020) In 2018, 650 colleges had an on-campus food pantry to help combat food insecurity. (U.S.G.A Office, 2019)

Selected Colleges' Initiatives to Address Student Food Insecurity

 <p>Educating faculty, staff, and students</p>	 <p>Nutrition, cooking, and budgeting classes</p>	 <p>Food pantries and other food provision</p>	 <p>Centralizing student services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help applying for benefits • Counseling • Disability support services • Financial aid • Veterans services 	 <p>Emergency aid</p>	 <p>Research/ data analysis</p>
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Source: Information from colleges GAO contacted. | GAO-19-95

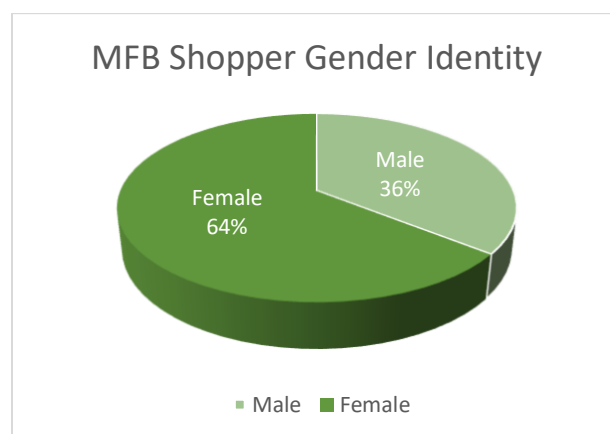
Federal student aid generally does not cover all college costs for low-income students, and college students may have limited access to federal food assistance programs such as SNAP because of program eligibility restrictions. Some state SNAP agencies reported that they are taking steps to help students access SNAP by conducting outreach to colleges and developing guidance. Nevertheless, at 9 of the 14 colleges GAO contacted, some college officials and students said that they were unfamiliar with or did not fully understand SNAP's student eligibility rules. Some college officials said that they would like information from FNS to better explain SNAP student rules, but FNS has not made such information easily accessible on its website. Further, college officials and state SNAP agencies noted that FNS does not share examples of actions taken by other states to help eligible students access SNAP. Clarification of SNAP student eligibility rules and enhanced information sharing about state efforts could help ensure that potentially eligible college students can access federal food assistance programs.

Middlesex Community College and food insecurity

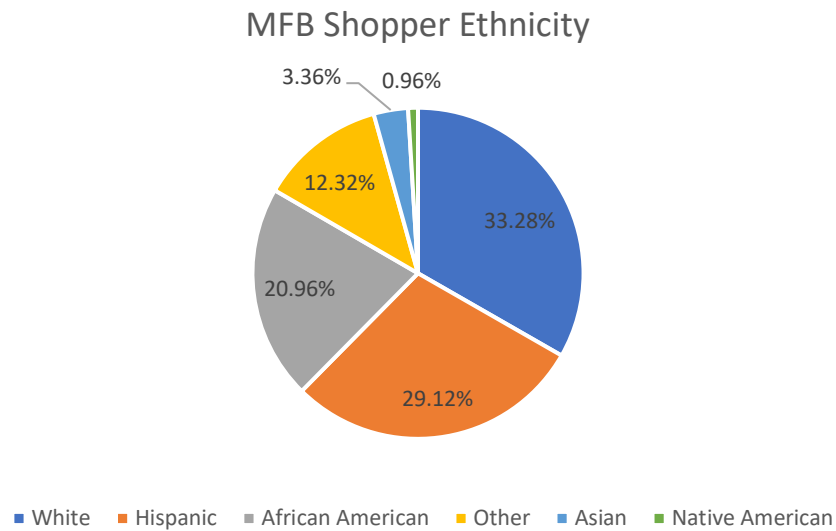
The Magic Food Bus at Middlesex Community College

Inspired by a recently opened food pantry at Norwalk Community College, Professor Judith Felton and Coordinator of Institutional Advancement, Trenton Wright, headed the effort to bring a mobile food pantry to MxCC to serve students and staff. Operating out of a “Spitfire” party bus which was converted to this purpose by Vinal Technical High School students, the MFB officially opened on September 21, 2016. During the winter and summer months the pantry is located upstairs in Founders Hall. The MFB is operated by students, serving students, staff, faculty, and their families to alleviate the challenges of food insecurity. MFB offers boxed and canned goods, personal hygiene products, baby supplies, pet food, and fresh garden produce when in season. The ability to provide access to free food items supports students’ success and the student retention rate. The food pantry also provides opportunities for internships, leadership, education, and community-engagement for the students.

The MFB is supported by community partnerships, local grant funds and private donations. Donations of food and cash come from students, faculty, staff, and food drives with community partners. The average MFB shopper is between 24 and 25 years of age with three to four family members in their household. Two-thirds of MFB shoppers are women. Approximately 33% of MFB shoppers self-identify as Caucasian, 29% Hispanic, and 21% African American. The rest of the shoppers self-identify as Asian, Native American, or other.



a. Data provided by the Magic Food Bus, 2019-2020



b. Data provided by the Magic Food Bus, 2019-2020

Nearly 7,100 units of food were distributed by the MFB in 2018-2019 to 560 unique students, feeding 1,525 students and their family members from 59 communities (refer to MFB Infographic p. 37 for complete details). This is an increase of 60% over the previous year. The MFB expanded to Platt High School in January 2019 to serve MxCC students who attend college classes at Platt High School. Students place orders for items which are prebagged and delivered the next business day to the pantry site at Platt High School in Meriden.

Veteran's Memorial Natural Garden

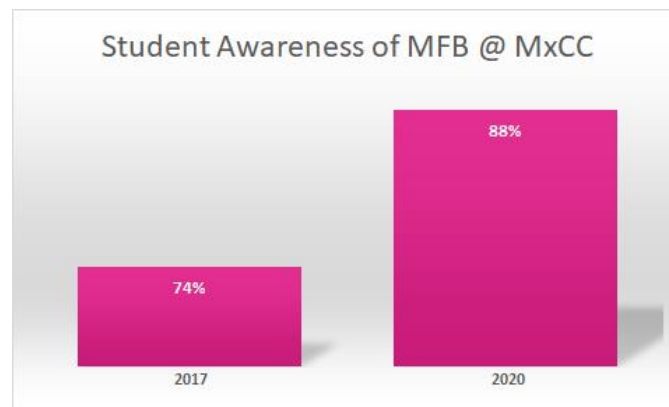
Located on the campus of MxCC, The Veteran's Memorial Natural Garden is a 7,000 square foot garden featuring 12 raised beds which provide fresh, healthy produce for the MFB. The garden is operated by students and supported by community partners including the Rockfall Foundation, Newman's Own Foundation, private donations and grant funding from Middletown Community Development Block Grant Program, the Connecticut River Coastal Conservation District, the MxCC Foundation, and many MxCC employees. The garden was officially dedicated on October 15, 2019. Fresh produce was amongst the top items surveyed students indicated they would like the MFB to provide.



C. Veteran's Memorial Natural Garden ribbon cutting October 15, 2019

The Magic Food Bus MxCC student survey 2020

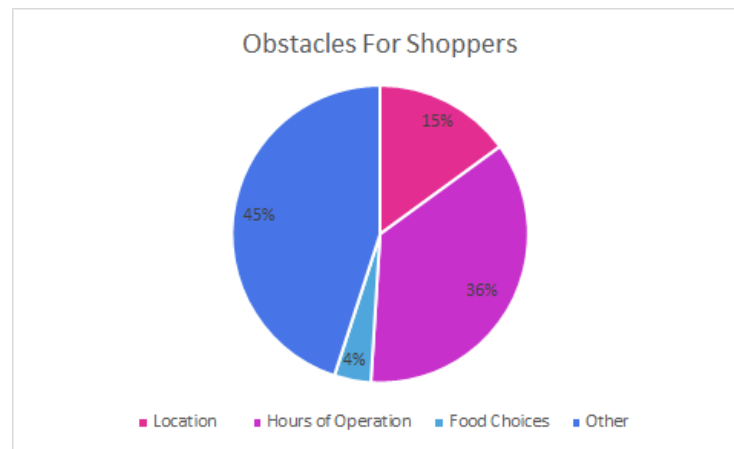
A student survey, originating from the Office of Institutional Advancement, was conducted in March 2020 utilizing Survey Monkey through the Office of Institutional Research under its Director, Dr. Paul Carmichael. A similar study was conducted in 2017. Of the 1,943 students surveyed, 152 responded. The survey indicated both a high desire for and an awareness of the MFB. In fact, awareness had increased 14% in the three years since the first survey was conducted.



d. Student awareness has increased 14% over three years.

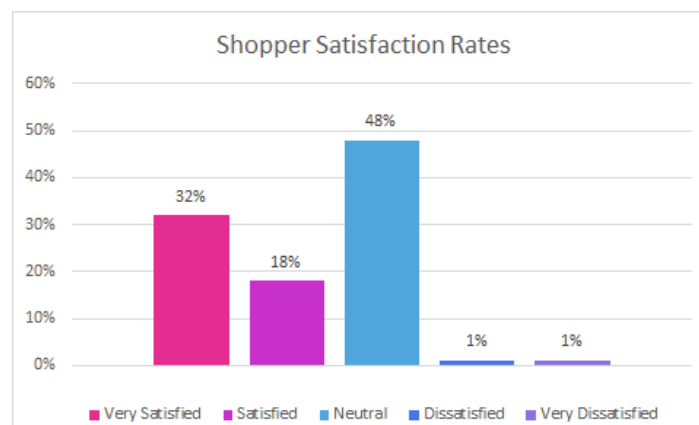
Fifty-four percent of 2020 survey respondents indicated that they have had limited or uncertain access to food. This is higher than results from national studies. Despite the awareness and exhibited need for the food pantry, only approximately 30% of the respondents

had visited the pantry. Two top reasons indicated for not visiting the pantry were the pantry's hours of operation and its location.



e. Students were asked for reasons why they have not visited the on-campus pantry.

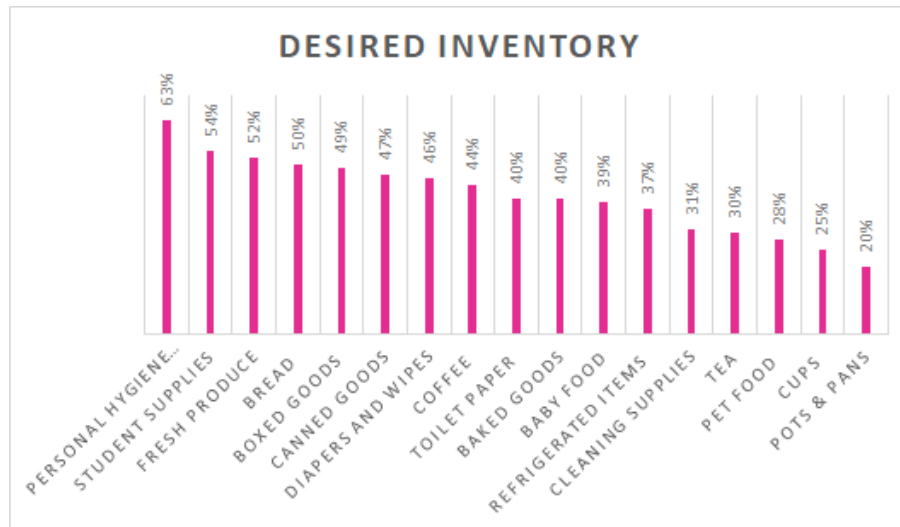
Overall, the survey results indicate that shoppers were satisfied with their experience at the pantry. Only 2% of respondents indicated they were dissatisfied with their experience.



f. Shopper satisfaction results from the 2020 school-wide survey.

The top desired inventory items were personal hygiene products, student supplies, fresh produce, bread, boxed and canned goods and diapers and wipes. Thirty-seven percent indicated a desire for refrigerated foods. The MFB has planned to order a commercial grade refrigerator which will permit the pantry to serve fresh produce, bread, and dairy products to

its shoppers. The refrigerator acquisition costs are offset by grant funding from Community Foundation of Middlesex County.



g. The survey asked students to choose the items they most needed the pantry to provide.

The COVID-19 crisis begins, a timeline

On December 31, 2019, a case of pneumonia with unknown cause was detected in Wuhan, China. A month later, the United States federal and state governments were working to prevent the spread of what was termed COVID-19, a novel coronavirus type of viral infection which had no known treatment nor vaccine. By January 25, 2020, a Wesleyan University student was evaluated for COVID-19. The possible rate of infection was a top concern for government officials, scientists, medical professionals and the public-at-large. The first Connecticut resident tested positive for COVID-19 on March 8, 2020. Three days later on March 11, 2020, the University of Connecticut transitioned to online classes only. The next day, Connecticut governor Ned Lamont issued executive orders to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. Grocery store inventories, particularly cleaning supplies and paper products such as toilet paper, were depleted by March 13, 2020.

Academic impact of COVID-19 within the MxCC community

Campus closure and Connecticut's Stay at Home Order

On March 13, 2020, all MxCC college courses were moved to online instruction. Two days later, the campus was closed to all students and staff. Students and staff needed to adapt quickly to new and ever changing COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions. Traditional on-campus courses were adapted to a distance learning format. This posed expected challenges for the students, staff, and faculty. Access to equipment, technology and internet was one unique challenge.

"It's a little difficult with no Wi-Fi at my house, so I have to go to my aunt's house every other day to use hers."-J.S.

The adjustments naturally caused tensions and increased the stress levels of many students. In the early days after the closure one student specifically expressed how the inability to access the Academic Success Center was affecting their mental well-being.

"The Academic Success Center has contributed greatly towards my achievement of high academic standing. I am currently a Phi Theta Kappa member and I wonder if I am going to be able to acquire the necessary grades to remain a member. Without the one on one personal tutoring and collaboration with my professors, my anxiety grows"- G.L.

Students worried about their continued success and future academic standing as they adjusted to an online format. The college allowed for students to change their course status to Pass/Fail to preserve their current GPA. Some students with field placements needed to take an incomplete and finish their required hours at a later time.

"The online-only format is not a good way for me to be learning. In addition, I can't keep up with all of the assignments, and it's caused my motivation to drop to an all-time low. As of now, I've set all of my classes to take advantage of the expanded Pass/Fail option, because I'm going to likely JUST BARELY pass with a D otherwise. I WISH I could have just gotten refunds for my classes and taken them during a semester where there wasn't a global quarantine. -T.L.

“My academic life has been impacted for the worse due to the online class format because certain class types are better suited to a traditional environment rather than an online one. For instance, a math course can become difficult without the teacher being present for support.” -A.C.

Some students need to balance their school demands and household demands in an uncharted way. Students helped their siblings or their children with their primary and secondary school work while maintaining their own course workload.



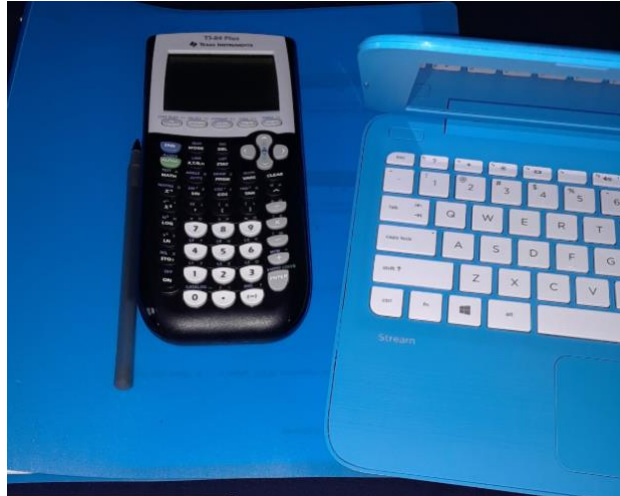
h. A MxCC student's siblings attend to their distance learning lessons.

“I have been helping my siblings Monday through Friday getting all their work done with any additional help they need from me, whether it’s any problems they are stuck on, reading and writing and emailing teachers about any questions we may have.” -Q. S.

“I have been dropped into the position of stay at home mother, home schoolteacher, daycare provider, and still be a student and employee. I’m very frustrated, my workload at school has not slowed down.” -A.V.

As some students struggled with the new challenges they faced, some students experienced the online class format as an advantage. These students were able to restructure their class work schedule to fit the new normal of life.

“It’s been easier having online classes. I complete my work and have free time to do other things. And have plenty of things to keep me occupied at home.”- J.S.



i. A student's supplies for online course work.

As the duration of the Connecticut Stay at Home Order continued, some students shared how the crisis was affecting their general mental health. Some students experienced having family members who became ill or died. They felt a sense of helplessness at not being able to support their loved ones in a manner they wished. Some students expressed preexisting mental health disorders being exacerbated such as obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, and depression. Some students felt the absence of group support during their recovery for addictions. For many others, the simple lack of socializing and interacting with friends and classmates had its own negative effect.

Impact of COVID-19 on food security within the MxCC community

The Impact of COVID-19 on the Magic Food Bus

As a result of the campus closure, on March 19, 2020 the MFB services were transferred to the Amazing Grace Food Pantry in Middletown (AGFP). To support AGFP during the pandemic, the MFB transferred \$1,500 of food credits at the CT Food Bank to the AGFP and donated about 40% of its inventory to AGFP. The MFB staff also offered to assist with food distribution at the AGFP.



j. MFB coordinator Trenton Wright at Amazing Grace Food Pantry on March 20, 2020

Besides providing free nonperishable foods and supplies, the MFB provides job opportunities for student workers and field placement positions for Human Services and Social Work students. The closure of campus provided an opportunity to convert those positions to telecommuting and distance learning experiences. Maintaining a student worker's income is vital as they do not always qualify for unemployment insurance benefits.

The students working at the MFB journaled their experiences during the COVID-19 crisis. Some of their stories have been shared with the community through MxCC's social media and electronic communications. Field placement students who previously had been tasked with implementing and managing food drives, helping with grants, marketing and promoting the food pantry, adjusted their field experience into this research report. Field placements are an integral part of the curriculum for a MxCC Human Services or Social Work degree. Many field placement students needed to defer the completion of their field placement until their sites were able to accommodate them upon the easing of Governor Lamont's Stay at Home Order. Dr. Jennifer Hernandez, Associate Professor and Coordinator of Human Services at MxCC emphasized the importance of continuing field placements in a safe way during the COVID-19 crisis. "Organizations are struggling to sort out the new normal while meeting the needs of their clients and community. Field placements can provide a creative innovative opportunity for organizations to use students to explore areas in which they may not be able to do at the time. As Human Service providers navigate this current pandemic, we all have to collaborate more than ever to serve those in need."

COVID-19 and grocery stores

Like so many around the state and country, MxCC students had difficulty getting the food and products they needed from grocery stores. There were challenges due to lack of income, lack of inventory particularly toilet paper, hand sanitizer and popular food items at the stores, lack of transportation, and dealing with social distancing practices established at grocery stores. Safety precautions included 6-foot separation, one-way designated aisles, face masks, disposable gloves and store employees taking customers' temperatures.

“There still seems to be a lack of access to food pantries for individuals that reside in Meriden, CT. I ventured out again into the community for some exercise and to pick up some essential items from Walmart in Wallingford, CT. I was expecting to acquire some toilet paper or bleach, but as you will see from the photos that I’ve included in this Weekly/Daily Log the shelves were bare, and a sign was displayed that read, ‘Attention Customers to help serve as many members as possible, we respectfully ask you to limit your purchase to 1 per item. Thank you for your understanding.’” -G.L.



k. BJ's Wholesale Club instituted purchase limits.



l. Grocery stores implemented policies to limit purchases.

“Overall, shopping has recovered significantly in terms of stock, but notably a couple changes have happened. First of all, many signs are limiting shoppers to four items from a certain section, in our case it was the meat section that had this. Second of all, and this is very recently, stores are only permitting a certain number of shoppers in at a time, and only limiting a couple people per family to actually go in the store. That said, the shortages of pasta and bread are easing up, while there were still gaps in the section, there was a lot of bread and pasta available. A lot of sections that were completely barren last week are stocked more this week. We attempted to purchase bandanas, so we’d have something to use as makeshift masks, but as we were expecting, nobody had any in stock. Also, toilet paper and cleaning products are STILL hard to come by. We also noticed more supermarkets with tape markers denoting 6ft. to assist people with social distancing.” -T.L.



m. Cleaning supplies were difficult to procure.



n. Dairy products were unavailable.

“I have been involved in limited food acquisition due to the new rules and enforcements on population capacity in grocery stores. Many stores have a one member per family limit now to decrease the amount of people inside but because of this I cannot help my mom lift heavier items in the stores.” -A.C.



O. Bottled water supply



p. Pasta shelves were nearly empty.

“I have my temperature taken before I am allowed to go into the grocery store, and when I have to bring my toddler with me, I am subject to stares and people judging me. Not to mention the risk I am putting her in.”-A.V.



q. Long lines of customers waiting to enter a store.

Local school lunches provided for primary and secondary students

Many Connecticut school systems provided free school lunches to students during the state mandated closures. This was possible due to a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture which oversees school provided meals. By March 16, 2020, 30% of Connecticut’s schools were closed, leaving 56% of Connecticut’s students without the meals they relied upon. (Echevarria, 2020)

“Something that my parents have been doing for my younger sisters is going by one of the schools in the morning to pick up meals since all of my sisters’ schools have been closed.”- L.C.



r. Schools continued to provide free meals to students.

MxCC provides assistance

Aid from MxCC Student Senate

MxCC’s Student Senate continued to meet during the campus closure utilizing online video conferencing. Janet Klinck, Director of Student Services, reached out via the Student Activities Facebook page to engage students. Online games were hosted and gift cards were given as prizes. Student Activities also hosted online trivia games with winners earning cash prizes up to \$200.

MxCC Foundation aid

The Middlesex Community College Fund launched a new fund in response to the financial hardships linked to the COVID-19 crisis. The MxCC Foundation through their MxCC Cares Fund, was able to provide immediate emergency funds to students who were struggling to pay bills while finishing their spring semester course work. Scholarships were available for summer courses in cases when traditional financial aid was limited and financial support was available for short-term job retraining post the public health crisis. The Cares Fund has raised over \$3,000 to date (Middlesex Community College, 2020)

MxCC Listening Lounge

MxCC's Listening Lounge provides free and confidential mental health counseling services to students throughout the academic year. Listening Lounge services were provided to students via virtual meeting platforms.

Local food pantries provide support

Connecticut Food Bank

With hundreds of thousands of residents unemployed due to the pandemic, the Connecticut Food Bank (CT Food Bank) saw an increase in how many families they support. In one week during the crisis, the CT Food Bank distributed 520,000 pounds of food, an increase of 120,000 lbs. over an average week. "The food bank is on track to distribute an increase of 100,000 pounds of food in March 2020 over March 2019." (Connecticut Food Bank, 2020)

Food pantries are seeing a decrease in donations from individuals, but some grocery store chains and corporations are filling the gaps. Stop & Shop donated one million dollars to CT Food Bank and other pantries. Big Y provided \$125,000 to food banks in Connecticut and Massachusetts. The CT Food Bank and Foodshare each received an immediate donation of \$25,000 from Big Y. Food collection boxes were placed in grocery stores to benefit local pantries. Big Y has donated over \$11.5 million dollars to Connecticut and Massachusetts area food banks, providing for about 5.7 million meals. Two-thirds of those meals include meat and produce donations. (Staff, 2020)

The CT Food Bank receives substantial funding from Feeding America. The Feeding America network is the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief organization, working to connect people with food and end hunger. The MFB is a partner agency with the CT Food Bank. The CT Food Bank serves Fairfield, Litchfield, Middletown, and New Haven, New London, and Windham counties which covers the MxCC primary 18-town service area with the exception of Rocky Hill. Last year the CT Food Bank distributed food to prepare nearly 22.5 million meals.

Foodshare

Foodshare, a foodbank serving the Greater Hartford region, connects with those in need through its network of 280 partner food pantries, meal programs and mobile sites. (Foodshare, Inc, (n.d.)) Foodshare began operating a drive-through operation at Rentschler Field in East Hartford during the COVID-19 pandemic. The operation began at the end of April and was expected to run through mid-May but extended their distribution to the end of May due to high demand from the families in Hartford and Tolland counties. Jason Jakubowski, president and CEO of Foodshare said in a news release that an average of 1,000 cars per day were being served. People waited in a line of car for hours. (NBC Connecticut, 2020) Foodshare workers stated that the majority of those they served were new to food insecurity due to job loss from business closures. (King, 2020) This sentiment was expressed by personnel in several other food pantries. Community members who were unable to drive to Rentschler Field were able to access the Foodshare mobile food pantry.

Some Inconvenient Workforce Implications

The long lines of cars at Rentschler Field are the modern automated version of the soup lines of the Great Depression of the 1930's. A recent Brookings Institution survey found that more than one in five U.S. households were food insecure at the end of April. The latest state department of labor report indicated that about 266,300 workers, more than 16% of the entire Connecticut labor force, lost their jobs in April because of the COVID-19 pandemic along with 20,700 layoffs in March. These recent dismal workforce numbers are now more than double the state's total job losses during the Great Recession of 2008-10. (The Day, 2020)



S. (A) Actual soup/food line from the Great Depression. (blogspot.com)



s. (B) A long line of vehicles waiting for Foodshare's drive-through pantry at Rentschler Field, East Hartford. Photo by NBC CT

Photo credit NBC Connecticut



t. The head of Foodshare's operation at the Regional Market in Hartford unloads a pallet of onions. Photo by NBC Connecticut

Amazing Grace Food Pantry, Middletown, CT

The AGFP has been a partner with the MFB since 2015. AGFP is supported through St. Vincent de Paul in Middletown and served more than 800 families per month pre-COVID-19 crisis. A family of four receives three days of groceries once a month. AGFP purchases food from the CT Food Bank and receives donations through its Families Feeding Families program, from community partners, and private individuals. (St. Vincent de Paul, 2016)

During the increased demand for provisions due to the Covid-19 crisis, MFB transferred store credits and donated 1,320 pounds of nonperishable foods and supplies to AGFP. AGFP opened two days a week to serve shoppers, including an influx of referred MxCC students. While this referral provided an alternative resource for students, it was not as convenient for them as their on-campus food pantry had been. Shoppers needed to have a source of transportation or nearby access to AGFP.



u. Inventory at Amazing Grace Food Pantry on March 20, 2020



v. MFB coordinator Trenton Wright delivered 1,320 pounds of inventory to Amazing Grace Food Pantry on May 1, 2020.

The Salvation Army, Meriden, CT

If the AGFP was difficult to access for some of MFB's Meriden shoppers, these students could utilize The Salvation Army in Meriden. The Salvation Army, Meriden location, operates three days a week for three hours in the morning. MFB donated 20% of its inventory to the Meriden Salvation Army upon closure of MxCC's campus. They received 333 pounds of nonperishables and other inventory from the MFB on May 1, 2020. Salvation Army Corps Officer Lt. Kate Borrero said that they "consider this an emergency disaster, and it's treated as such." The Salvation Army receives some funding through FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but with the demand increasing, volunteers, cash and inventory were in need. A new fund, the Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation Coronavirus Response Fund, was created with the collaboration of local financial backers including The United Way of Meriden and Wallingford and the Meriden-Wallingford Community Foundation. The funds were available to any registered 501(c) operating in Meriden and Wallingford, such as The Salvation Army. (Godin, 2020)



W. MxCC Interim CEO (now CEO) Steven Minkler delivered some of MFB's inventory to The Salvation Army, Meriden.

One obstacle to students utilizing The Salvation Army in Meriden is that transportation can be difficult for some to easily access the facility.

“I have limited access to food pantries due to my reliance on public transportation, and do not want to risk contracting the Coronavirus through the use” G.L.

The Salvation Army, Meriden also provided home delivery services to some clients. The students pictured below had some groceries delivered to them by MxCC Interim CEO (now CEO) Steven Minkler.



X. MxCC's Interim CEO Steven Minkler (now CEO) delivers groceries to students Gary Lambert and Harold Scott on May 1, 2020.

Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries, Old Saybrook, CT

The Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries (SSKP) serves eleven shoreline towns: Madison, Killingworth, Clinton, Westbrook, Old Saybrook, Old Lyme, East Lyme, Lyme, Essex, Deep River and Chester. The United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed) study found that 30% of shoreline households earn less than the basic cost of living threshold. In 2019, SSKP registered 7,169 people and served the equivalent of 949,261 meals. SSKP receives no state or federal funding. They are supported through donors, foundations, corporations, and faith communities.

Executive Director Amy Hollis expanded her scope of who she classified as being food insecure to factor those who could not find items they needed due to the limited supplies in grocery stores and included those who could not physically go to a store. (Morgan, April 2020) SSKP's nine meal sites were closed temporarily due to the COVID-19 crisis but their food pantries in East Lyme, Old Lyme, Old Saybrook, Westbrook, and Clinton remained open, operating under protective social distancing guidelines which included pre-bagging items and curbside delivery to vehicles. During the week of March 23, 2020, SSKP saw "a significant increase" in guests and many first-time guests due to new job losses and losses in pensions and retirement earnings. (Morgan, April 2020) By mid-April, the pantries were serving 27,000 pounds of food items and by the end of April the five pantries reported serving over 30,000

pounds of food to more than 900 families. (The Shoreline Soup Kitchens & Pantries, Inc, 2020) SSKP had seen a 40% increase in family units served in March 2019. Hollis expects a long-term recovery period especially for ALICE households who may have lost multiple wage sources. Partnerships with the Estuary Council, Meals on Wheels, 9 Town Transit and neighbors helping fellow neighbors overcome logistical limitations for some homebound residents to receive food. (Morgan, April 2020) While physical distancing limited the number of volunteers the pantries could allow to only six or seven per pantry, the volunteers were grateful for opportunities to help their neighbors and SSKP has developed a waiting list of volunteers. (Reisman, 2020) Hollis stated that last year 42% of their food came from the Gemma Moran Food Bank and the CT Food Bank. About 30% of donations were received via food drives and private donations. Food drives were suspended during social distancing and individual donations have decreased. SSKP purchased the rest of their inventory but supplies were limited. Local restaurants stepped forward as a resource for donations. (Reisman, 2020)



y. Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries is providing curbside delivery for its shoppers. Photo credit SSKP.



Z. Prebagged groceries at Shoreline Soup Kitchens and Pantries. Photo credit SSKP

Gemma Moran United Way/Labor Food Bank, New London, CT

Normally operating as a pop-up pantry with farmer's market style of serving, the Gemma Moran United Way/Labor Food Bank served its clients with prepacked reusable bags of provisions during COVID-19 social distancing. The Gemma Moran United Way/Labor Food Bank provides food to 66 regional programs including emergency food pantries, community meal sites, school-age meal programs and 10 mobile pantries, serving southeastern Connecticut. Vice President of Community Impact and Warehouse Manager, Dina Sears-Graves reported that donations were down and need had increased. They asked for cash donations rather than food donations so that they could purchase priority food items. The Gemma Moran United Way received donations of perishable foods from Mohegan Sun and Foxwoods casinos when both closed as a COVID-19 response. Some food pantries have built relationships with private companies to fill the demand for inventory such as St. Vincent de Paul Place in Norwich. Executive Director, Jillian Corbin highlighted their relationship with Stop & Shop for produce, bread, and desserts. She noted that the collection bin donations had nearly ceased since the COVID-19 outbreak. (Bessette, 2020)

State and Federal Government assistance

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Hunger Crisis Looming

The SNAP, formerly the Food Stamps Program, is the largest federal nutrition assistance program. SNAP benefits are available to low-income individuals and families who meet certain financial criteria. (U.S. Government, (n.d.)) SNAP has been shown to reduce food insecurity by about 30% and kept almost 3 million people out of poverty in 2018. (JAMA, 2020).

The government recently expanded the eligibility requirements for SNAP benefits. Work requirements for able bodied adults without dependent children and the three-month SNAP time limit were suspended for the duration of the public health emergency per a congressional action. Benefits will automatically be renewed through October 2020 for those whose renewal was March 2020 and automatically renewed through November 2020 for any May 2020 renewals. The Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 provides for Emergency SNAP benefits to 97,000 households not currently receiving the maximum benefits. Those who were not usually eligible for the maximum benefit would receive the maximum benefit. This Act allocates \$28 million in additional SNAP benefits which is an average increase of \$296 extra per household. (State of Connecticut, (n.d.))

CARES Act, a federal stimulus aid bill

In April 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) to provide approximately \$2 trillion stimulus to the economy. Funds were delegated for state, local and tribal governments, education funding for institutions of higher education, disaster relief, National Guard deployments, public health and safety, transit systems, election security, business loans, expanded unemployment benefits and direct cash payments to an estimated 175 million Americans earning less than \$99,000 annually. Cash payments of up to \$1,200 per adult and \$500 per dependent child began to be distributed in April 2020. There were challenges with the implementation of the CARES Act. The payments of the cash disbursements were sent out first via direct deposit for those citizens who had accounts set up with the U.S. Treasury and those with Social Security accounts first. Those Americans who did not have existing accounts needed to either upload their banking

information into a web portal. Six percent of U.S. adults, 12 million people, do not have a bank account (2018 Federal Reserve report). They along with those who do not have access or understanding of the web portal would wait weeks for a paper check to be mailed to them. These one-time payments were scheduled for distribution between April and September 2020. Single adults earning more than \$99,000 and married couples earning more than \$198,000, dependent children, those without social security numbers and nonresident aliens without green cards, were not eligible for stimulus checks. (Tsekova, 2020)

The Department of Education (DOE) released guidelines in mid-April detailing how the colleges and universities could distribute the portion of CARE Act funds designated to help institutions of higher education. On April 27, 2020, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities (CCSU) President Mark Ojakian issued an email detailing the severely restrictive guidelines. The guidance limited assistance to those students who had filed a Free Application For Student Aid (FAFSA). Many students choose to not complete a FAFSA form due to its complexity. Likewise, many middle-class families, many of whom had experienced a loss of income due to COVID-19, did not file a FAFSA and are no ineligible to receive CARES Act funds from the colleges and universities.

Undocumented students, international students and many noncredit students were also ineligible under the DOE guidance. President Ojakian stated “in total, (the guidance) could disqualify up to 30,000 students across our institutions.” CSCU was processing payments as quickly as possible and President Ojakian reached out to DOE Secretary Betsy DeVos to encourage her to reverse the guidance decision. (Ojakian, 2020) The Department of Education had not reversed their decision by early May. CARES Act grant funding was able to be dispersed only to those students who complied with the DOE guidelines. This left many students ineligible for grant money including students exclusively enrolled in non-credit courses, CSCU employees attending classes for free, students on dependent waivers, Second Chance Pell students, High School Partnership/Dual Enrollment students, undocumented, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and International students. (Minkler S. L., 2020) Nevertheless, as of May 27 2020, some 1,062 MxCC students received CARES Act grants of \$340.38 each, with more students expected to receive grants through an appeals process. (Board of Regents, 2020).

Part of the second wave of the CARES Act provided \$8.8 billion for schools to provide meals for students, \$450 million to food banks and community food distribution programs and \$15.5 billion to cover the cost of new SNAP applicants. Additional funds were allocated and access to federal nutrition programs granted to American Indian reservations, Puerto Rico, Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa. (Snell, 2020)

Planning for the future

Postponed plans are tentatively rescheduled

Upon campus closure and the Stay at Home Order, all events scheduled at MxCC were postponed or cancelled. This included awards ceremonies and the graduation ceremony. The 2020 commencement ceremony was postponed and converted to a virtual graduation on June 4, 2020.

The MFB needed to adjust plans also. Funds awarded to MFB from a grant provided by Community Foundation of Middlesex County were scheduled to be utilized to purchase a commercial grade refrigerator. The purchase was delayed due to the campus closure and state directed COVID-19 safety procedures.

Many food banks partner with or support their own vegetable gardens as a resource for fresh produce. Victory gardens are expected to increase in popularity during and post the pandemic as a response to families' food demands. Gardens such as MFB's Veteran's Memorial Natural Garden and the Gemma Moran United Way/Labor Food Bank Garden in New London were delayed due to social distancing measures. (Bessette, 2020). The scheduled planting for the MFB's garden was delayed during the pandemic. A community build day had been scheduled for mid-April but was cancelled due to social distancing measures being enacted. The goal of this year's community build was to construct and install more raised beds and begin plantings. These extra beds will expand the variety and abundance of fresh produce grown in the garden. A modified community build and planting day with five volunteers was proposed for May 27 and was not approved locally, due to ongoing maintenance concerns during the summer growing season. A revised effort may be submitted for some planting in the garden just before the fall semester, if MxCC opens in late August.

If a full opening occurs this fall, the MFB could restock and operate under modified social distancing and with additional sanitary practices. The MFB could also operate with reduced hours if the MxCC campus only opens to some classes in the fall. If all classes remain online, the MFB will probably transfer additional inventory to the AGFP and the Salvation Army in Meriden and direct students to those pantries temporarily.

MxCC planning for post pandemic

In mid-March, a COVID-19 Response Team was formed to serve as an extended MxCC Cabinet within the governance structure. The COVID-19 Response Team initially met every day to address the emergency nature of transitioning of MxCC. As part of the Governor's plan for emerging from the crisis, the System Office working together with the colleges and universities began to plan for the reopening of campuses. The process is expected to be gradual, last several months and cause changes to daily operations throughout the college for an indeterminate period of time.

CSCU President Mark Ojakian asked each community college to form a Fall Planning Team (Team). The Team includes Cabinet members and key faculty and staff in human resources and fiscal departments. Bargaining unit leaders were also included in the process. The MxCC Team included members from the COVID-19 Response Team as well as additional members. The MxCC Team's work was completed late May to meet Governor Lamont's deadline for opening plan submission in early June. The MxCC Team's purpose was to undertake a campus review of what made sense given the circumstances, student population, and other factors. Ideas are then presented to three system wide Steering Committees composed of Campus CEOs, the Regional Presidents, and System Office staff. The Steering Committees focuses on Academics & Enrollment Management, Technology, Logistics and Operations, and Student Life and Student Support Services. The best ideas are then shared across the colleges, to have a consistent approach among the twelve, and to have customized plans that are unique to the campuses, student body, employees and community needs. Members of the MxCC Team were:

* Steve Minkler, Interim Campus CEO (now CEO), Chair

Melissa Behney, Director of Library & Learning Commons Services

* Diane Bordonaro, Director of Non-Credit Programs

Donna Bontatibus, Professor of English

Emily Canto, Counselor & Interim Director of Student Services

* David England, Dean of Institutional Effectiveness

* Sara Hanson, Interim Director of Enrollment Management

* Kim Hogan, Dean of Administration

Rich Lenoe, Professor & Director, Center for New Media

* Corey Martell, Executive Assistant to the CEO

* Sharale Mathis, Dean of Academic & Student Affairs

Anastasia Pych, Human Resources

* Annie Scott, Director of Information Technology

* Judy Wallace, Professor of Biology & Coordinator, Radiologic Technology

Trent Wright, Coordinator of Institutional Advancement & 4C's Union Delegate

(indicates original COVID-19 Team member)* (Minkler, 2020)

The MxCC Team sent a survey to students in early May to gauge students' interest, plans and thoughts for the fall semester. Questions enquired about students' willingness and comfortability with safety distancing measures, COVID-19 testing and distance learning expectations. (Klinck, 2020) With the uncertainty of the vision for the future, students were waiting before making their plans.

"I have not registered for any fall semester classes yet, as I am uncertain of my return to the college campus. I may enjoy continuing the online format for future classes to continue my education and prepare for my graduation in the spring of 2021."-G.L.

While some students were eager to return to on-campus classes in the fall, others had reservations about what a new normal would encompass. Some students expressed concerns

about continuing social distancing practices, the accessibility of personal protective equipment, and sanitation standards and practices when campus is reopened.

“As much as I hope that the virus reduces down and we can go back, I feel as though I won’t be 100% guaranteed the world is still free and clean from it. So yes, sharing classrooms with other students will make me feel very cautious and walking time to classes with people brushing shoulders or the cafeteria. Those kind of crowds will make me feel cautious, maybe if we limit how many people can be in the cafeteria, have the seats pushed 6 ft apart too. I just hope we can go back though!”- Q.S.

“My concern is if classes are moved back to on-ground on August 26 and if the quarantine will be over by then. And if there will be a vaccine or the virus has been contained, so it's safer to go out and be around people. And if not, what are the precautions that will be taken to make sure everyone's safe and healthy.”- J.S.

Conclusion

While the COVID-19 pandemic was unexpected, overall, the MxCC community at-large rallied to meet the standards of a new normal. Based on and in response to both federal and state guidelines, changes were made quickly to students’ academic lives and everyday practices were altered in rapid response to the crisis. Faculty, with staff assistance, converted to full online format during the semester spring break. Nonprofits continued to simultaneously struggle but manage to provide for those who were in need. Federal and state governments, academic institutions, private corporations, neighbors, friends and relatives hastened to support as many people as they could while protecting clients. When the crisis will end remains uncertain. Committees were formed at many levels and discussions began to outline the areas of concerns over reopening the economy and schools.

“A new normal is being created before our very eyes.”- G.L.

Within three weeks of the early closing of MxCC on March 13, 2020, stories appeared on our local news outlets about food insecurity, in Connecticut, the most prosperous state, based on per capita income, in the United States. How can such a food crisis occur within such a short

period of time in a country with a booming economy based on low employment numbers and a robust stock market? Perhaps things are not quite as “robust” as we might think in our country. “Some 40% of Americans would struggle to come up with \$400 for an unexpected expense” according to an article in Personal Finance dated July 21, 2019. Too many Americans are living paycheck to paycheck and this does not bode well for many Connecticut residents during this unprecedented and long recession we have just entered. Many of our residents have never previously sought food assistance.

The grim prospect of a hunger crisis looms large across the world. Hunger is also disproportionately affecting communities of color. The United States, including Connecticut, has the means and policy infrastructure to provide assistance as the economic crisis will likely outlast the pandemic. Do we have the political will?

Hunger is avoidable.

Will lessons be learned?

The shock to our economic system and our reliance on food delivery and distribution systems and their workers to meet our nutritional needs has converted these employees to an “essential status” at great risk, with low wages, health coverage issues, lack of paid sick pay, and a competing fight for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) with other employers.

The COVID-19 Pandemic may have peeled back several layers of the American socioeconomic onion, under new magnification, revealing some fundamental fairness issues below the surface of a former thriving U. S. economy. Mary Kay Henry, International President, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which represents over 4,000 Connecticut community college faculty and professional staff, with about two million members nationally, has significant concerns about workers on the pandemic front lines and the path forward. “And that’s why this shock to our system that’s happened in the past 12 weeks, I think, is leading to this moment being a reckoning, where it’s woken us up to the depth of the economic and racial inequality crisis that existed long before more than 33 million people lost their jobs...and 64 million Americans earn less than \$15 an hour and can barely make ends meet by living paycheck to paycheck. This is a time where we have to choose: Are we going to a status quo

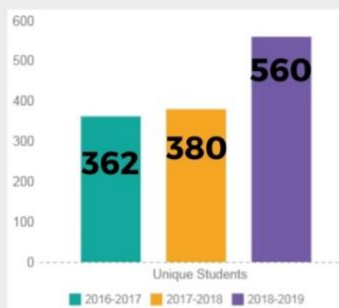
that was not good for the overwhelming majority of American families? Or are we going to use this shock to our system to create the real structural change that we need to rewrite the rules in health care, the environment, immigration and our economic systems to allow everybody to live healthy and safe lives, where our children can do better than we've done in this generation?" (N.Y. Times 2020).

Update Note: Just after the completion of this report, Connecticut began the state's long journey to "normal", perhaps better framed as the "new abnormal", with a graduated reopening process led by Gov. Lamont. The fall semester details have not been finalized. As of March 25, 2020 the state reports: 40,873 confirmed cases of Covid-19, 3,742 cases that have resulted in death (9.15 % mortality rate), and 706 patients hospitalized.



Magic Food Bus FAST STATS

*Unique Students Served



68%

From 17-18
Academic Year

Busiest Day

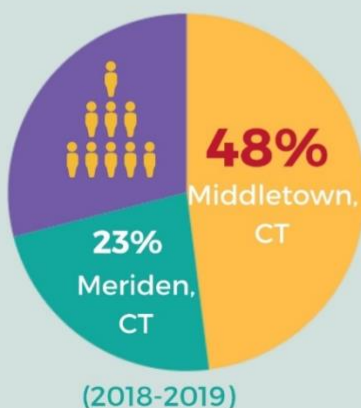
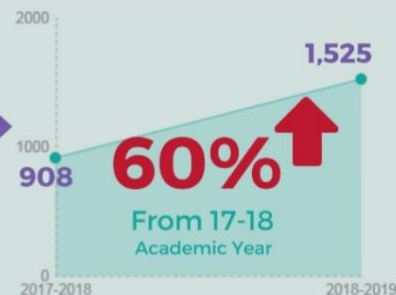
• Oct. 3, 2018 •

16
shoppers

During 2018-19, we served:

1,525 students & their families from

59 communities.



The Magic Food Bus is funded in part through a grant from the Community Foundation of Middlesex County and a grant from the City of Middletown, Community Development Block Grant Program. The Magic Food Bus also receives funding from MxCC faculty, staff, and friends.

*New MFB location added in January, 2019 at MxCC @ Platt.

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