N4CSGA Student Survey and Focus Group Input

Background

As the State Board and System Office were engaging in outreach for the System strategic plan and considering how to tap student input, System Office staff learned of plans by the N4CSGA (North Carolina Comprehensive Community Colleges Student Government Association) to develop a survey of students. The System Office Strategic Planning Team tapped the student-led survey under development for N4CSGA purposes for strategic planning, collaborating with the N4CSGA and its president and State Board member Nathan Vasquez. The N4CSGA's student leaders and senior advisor engaged the System Office in review of the draft survey to address questions of interest for strategic planning. This is the first survey of all North Carolina community college students in recent memory conducted with a major purpose of informing a System strategic plan. The N4CSGA intends to repeat the survey on a periodic basis in the future.

Survey Questions, Responses, and Results

The student survey was conducted anonymously using Google Forms and included questions about student demographics, students' community college experience, and how North Carolina community colleges could better serve special populations. Data were tabulated at the state level.

By 2/23/22, 3,104 survey responses (approximately 0.9% of students) had been collected from students from 49 community colleges. The survey responses overrepresented female students, but the racial/ethnic composition of the survey closely matched the composition of the North Carolina community college population. The survey overrepresented Curriculum students and under-represented Workforce Continuing Education (job training) students. In sum, the information provides an important glimpse into the perspectives of thousands of students and incorporates racial/ethnic diversity of students; care should just be taken in drawing conclusions, as the responses may not be representative of the student body.

Key questions and responses are as follows:

- *What three issues, if addressed, would make it easier for you to enroll?*
    - Top responses: 1) N/A (it was not difficult to enroll): 46%; 2) Balancing college with work or family commitments (44%); 3) Cost (34%); 4) FAFSA form for financial aid (hard to fill out or confusing (21%); 5) Transportation (14%).

- *Changes to what three issues would make it easier for you to succeed as a student?*
    - Top responses: 1) Balancing college with work or family commitments (54%); 2) Tuition and fees (39%); 3) Employability after graduation (24%); 4) Need for

more or different types of advising/support (17%); and tied for 5th most frequently cited issue at 13%: Technology challenges and Transportation challenges.

- *Community College was my first choice for education or training over other alternatives such as four-year college or university, private two-year college, or private training provider.*
    - Yes: 75%; No: 25%

- *How much do you agree with the statement: "My college makes an effort to make me feel welcomed and valued"?*
    - Agree or Strongly Agree: 82%
      (40% answered 10/10 on the rating scale)
    - Somewhat Agree: 12%
    - Disagree/Strongly Disagree: 6%

- *Did your college give you adequate information about financial assistance? (Financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans, etc.)*
    - Yes: 81%; No: 19%

- *My college provides me with helpful advising about careers and the right classes to reach my goals.*
    - Agree/Strongly Agree: 76%
      (37% answered 10/10 on the rating scale)
    - Somewhat Agree: 15%
    - Disagree/Strongly Disagree: 8%

- *Do you have any suggestions about how to improve the Community College System in North Carolina?*
    - Examples of open-ended responses related to…
        - Addressing tuition, fees, living expenses, books
        - Faculty and staff communication, support, pay
        - Advising, counseling, communicating about supports
        - Classes for working adults, flexibility with students
        - Communication and promotion of community colleges
        - College offerings, standards and standardization
        - Transportation around colleges and between campuses

- *What resources should colleges provide to promote minority male/female success? (Two questions)*
    - Sample responses:
        - Mentoring (e.g., modeled after Big Sibling program or Boy Scouts)
        - Scholarships/grants and information about existing resources, including workforce scholarships
        - Social or support or empowerment clubs
        - Outreach to younger students
        - Success stories, role models
        - Workshops/assemblies/focus groups about the challenges they face
        - Help walking through the college process
        - Approachable faculty/staff
        - More minority faculty and staff
        - Responsiveness to hard times (e.g., temporarily slowing down the workload)
        - Flexibility to accommodate rotating work shifts, children's school pick-ups, and other responsibilities
        - Child care while attending classes
        - Same resources as for other students to support them

See the end of this document for a presentation that shows key charts and statistics from the survey data.

<u>Focus Group Input from Students</u>

The N4CSGA held its Spring Division Meeting on February 26, 2022 and invited System Office Strategic Initiatives staff to participate. After Dr. Patrick Crane shared a presentation of the student survey results with all the N4CSGA students and staff participating, he and Anne Bacon facilitated focus groups on the top issues cited as barriers to student enrollment and success: cost factors (tuition/fees/other costs) and balancing community college with life (family/work/etc.).

In the cost factor focus group, students discussed specific issues that they found challenging:

- "Surprise costs" – high cost of textbooks, supplies, uniforms, with no information upfront to expect the costs
- Technology costs
- Challenges with completing the FAFSA form or being available on "FAFSA Day"
- Difficulty qualifying for financial aid (e.g., if considered a dependent on parents' tax form, just taking one class, or if an international student)
- Availability of supports as well as costs (e.g., child care in the evening for night classes)

Possible solutions discussed included…

- Free college or free classes
- Help paying book costs or exploration of OER (Open Educational Resources)
- Free (not loaner) laptops
- Child care scholarships and drop-in child care on campus
- FAFSA assistance on more than one day of the semester
- More information about existing scholarships and supports, and sharing information on social media

In the balancing community college with life focus group, students discussed issues that were challenging for them:

- Negotiating work schedules (especially when they are not fixed) with class schedules, working with the employer and the college
- Lack of any free time… and high stress
- Doing both college and other aspects of life well – having to sacrifice one for the other
- Child care challenges
- Mental health, substance abuse problems
- More limited hours of libraries, other college facilities due to the pandemic
- Lack of flexibility or rigid late work grading policies
- Limitations for Early College students to leave campus (making it impossible to work)
- Limited housing in the area near the college, making it hard to get to college and succeed
- Violence or chronic illness affecting the family or student

Possible solutions discussed included…

- Assistance to negotiate college and employer expectations
- Flexibility in college scheduling
- Unofficial scheduling flexibility and teaching/tutoring assistance from faculty and staff*
- Child care on campus
- Wellness focus and wellness events; exam week support*
- Tutoring or writing centers, with encouragement or grade incentives for students to attend*
- Time management assistance and first-year seminars that help with college and future success* -- but for adult learners
- Continued increase in online offerings, which was expanded during the pandemic
- Involvement in Early College, the Student Government Association to help students understand how to navigate college and better understand its offerings and support*
- Open Wifi on campus*
- Extended campus hours, especially for libraries, study rooms*

*Some students in the focus groups said these already exist at their college.

NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES

CREATING SUCCESS

N4CSGA Student Survey Results

N4CSGA Spring Division Meeting

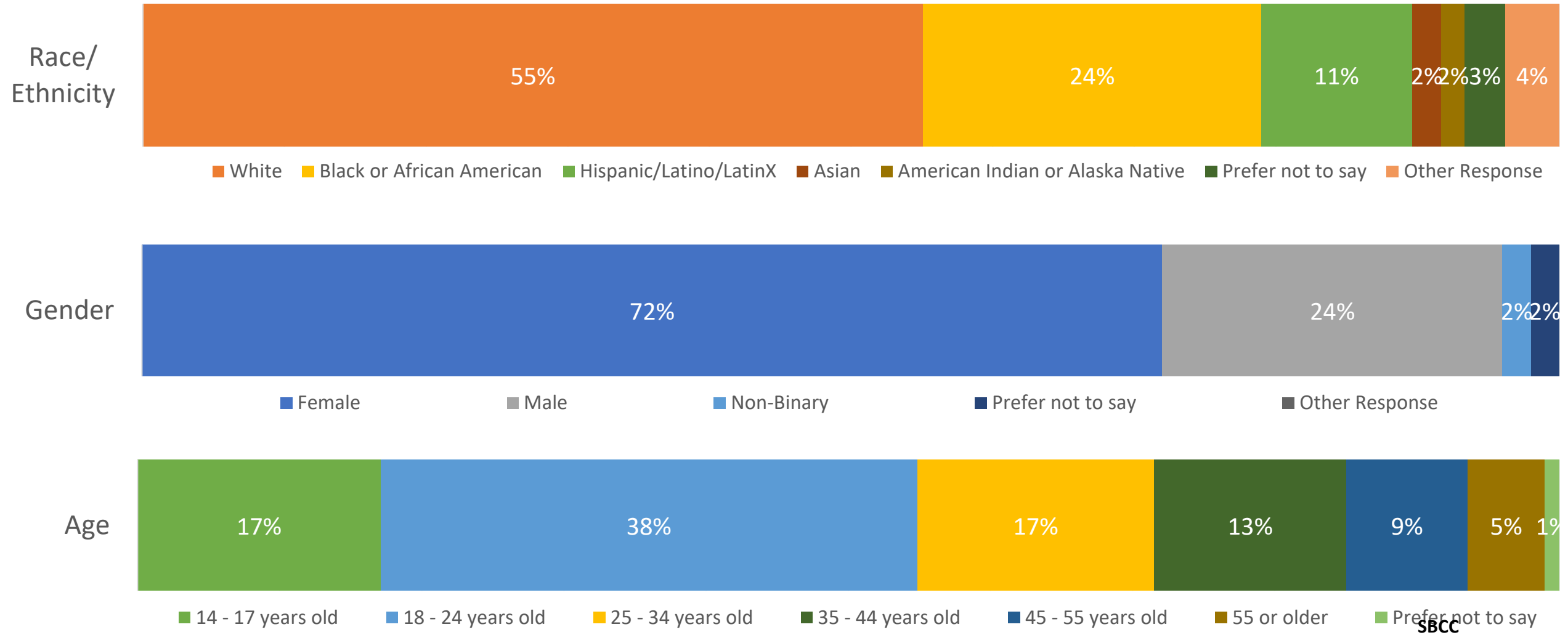
February 26, 2022

Survey Responses

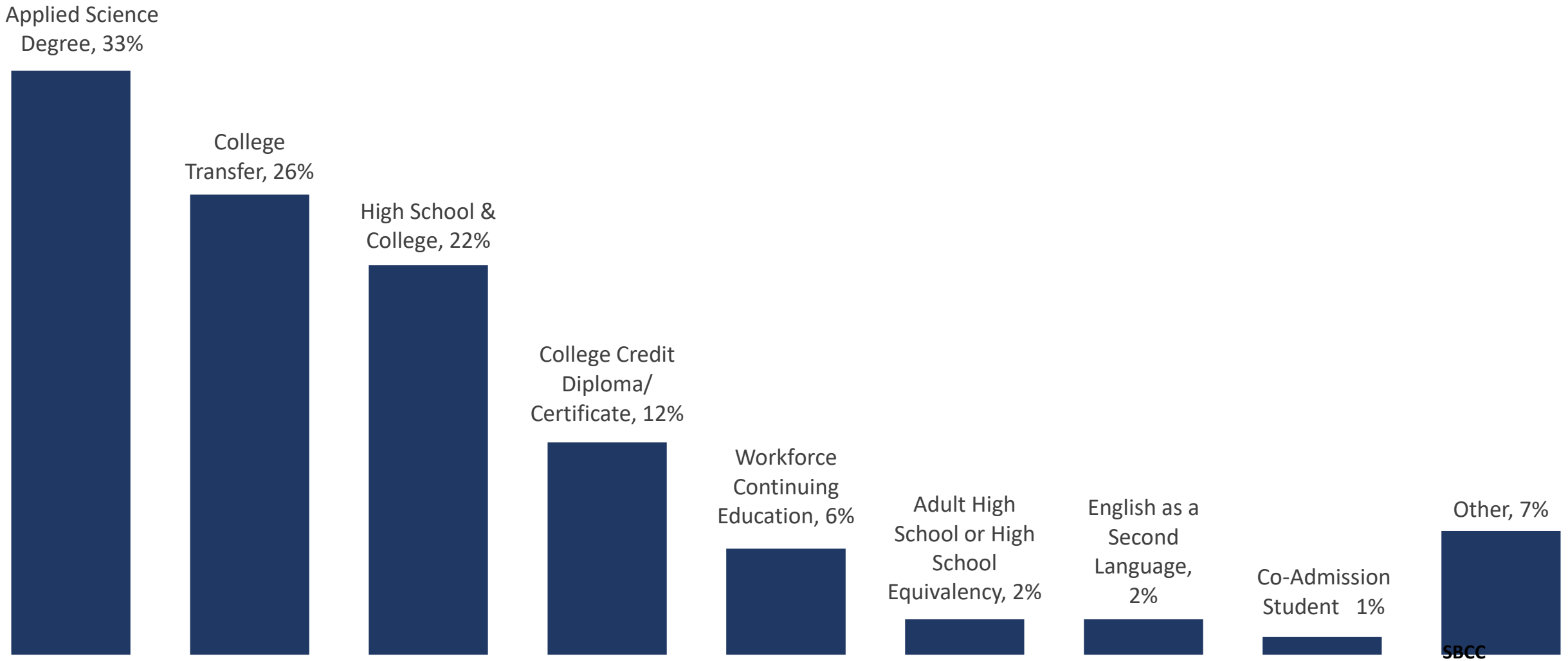
As of 2/23/2022, when data were pulled for analysis…

- 3,104 survey responses from 49 community colleges
- Similar racial/ethnic representation
- Some caveats:
  --low large-college representation relative to student enrollment in those colleges
  --more female students than student population
  --certain programs over- or under-represented
  --survey responses represent approximately 0.9% of students

Respondent Demographics



What programs or pathways are you currently enrolled in? (please choose all that apply to you)



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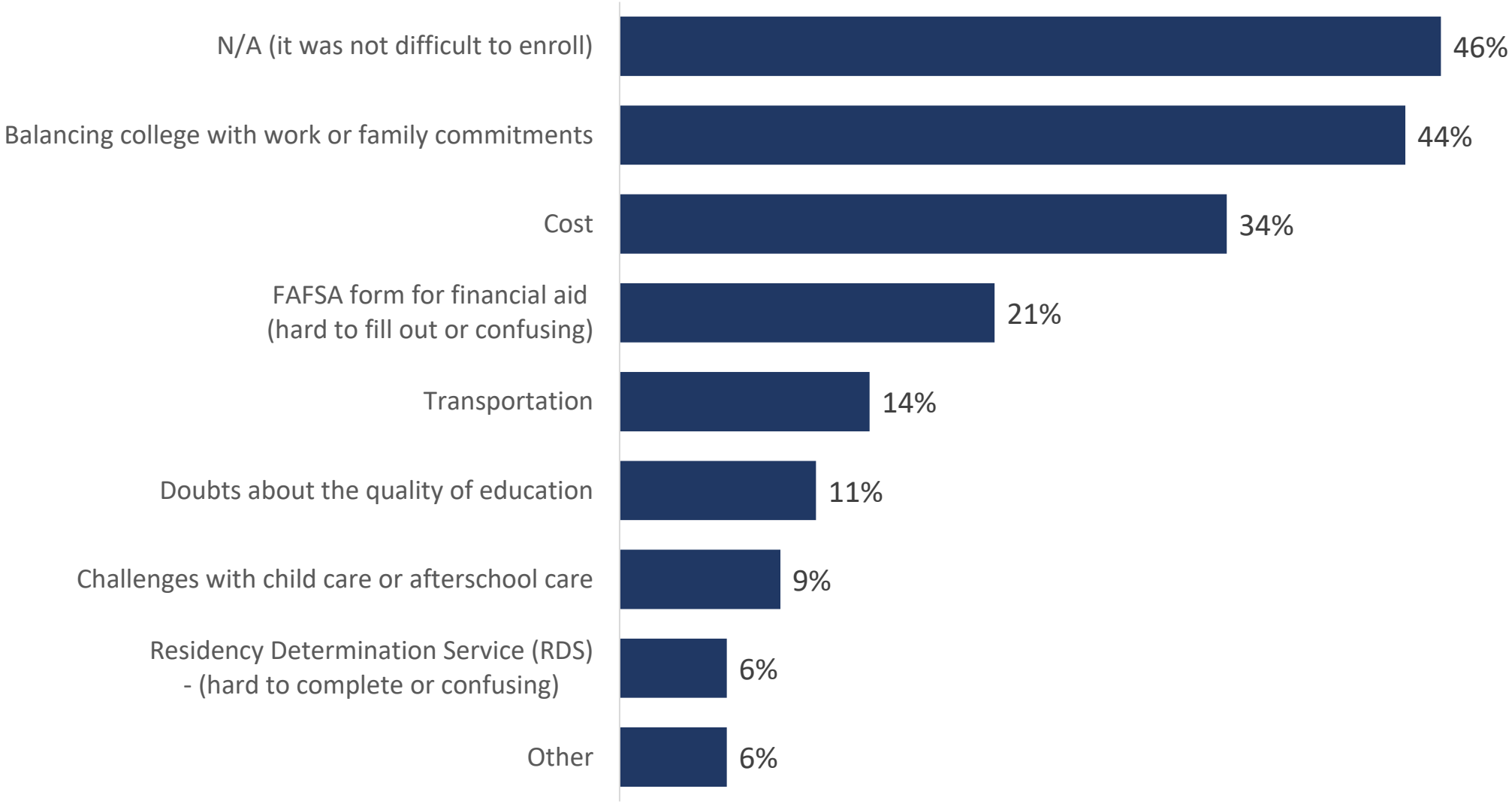
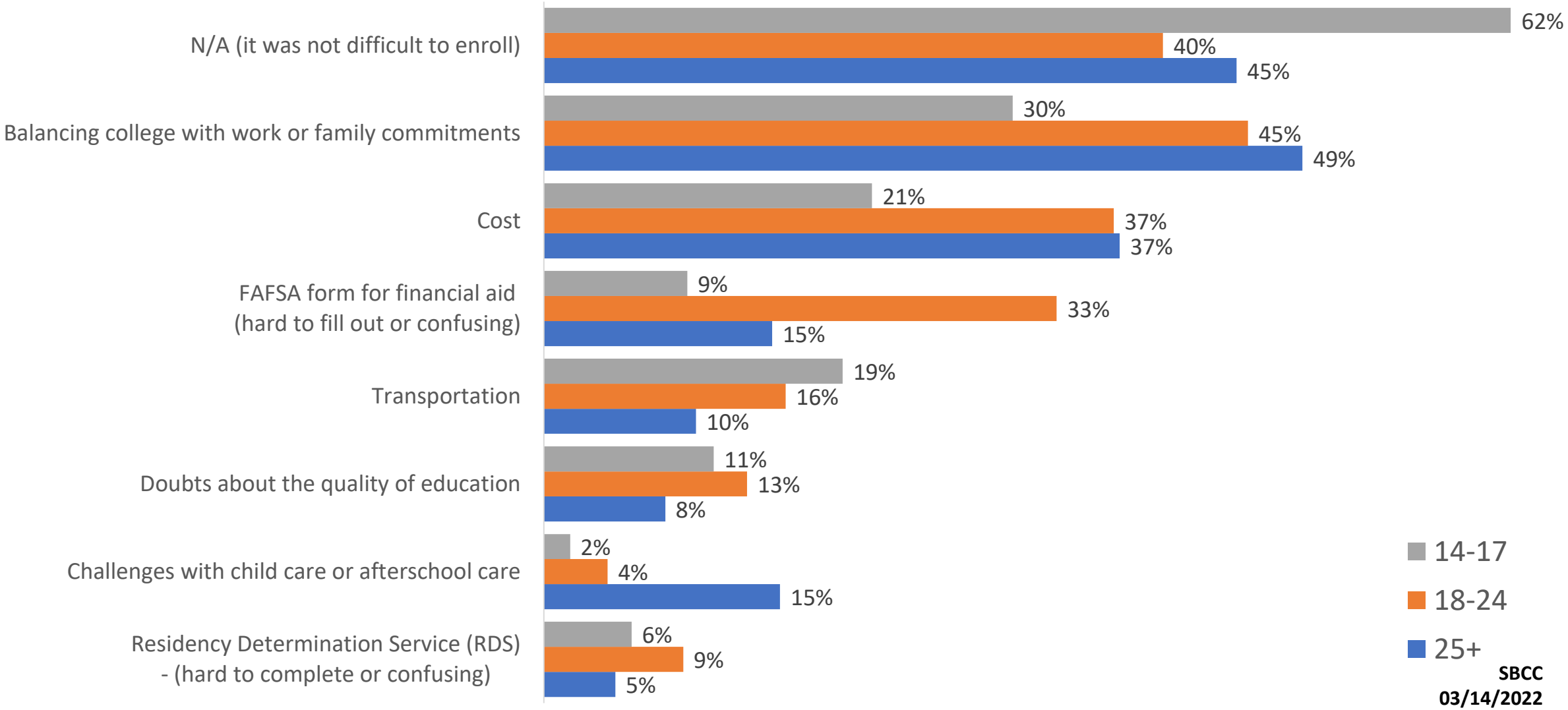


What three issues, if addressed, would make it easier for you to enroll? Check up to three responses. (By Age Range)



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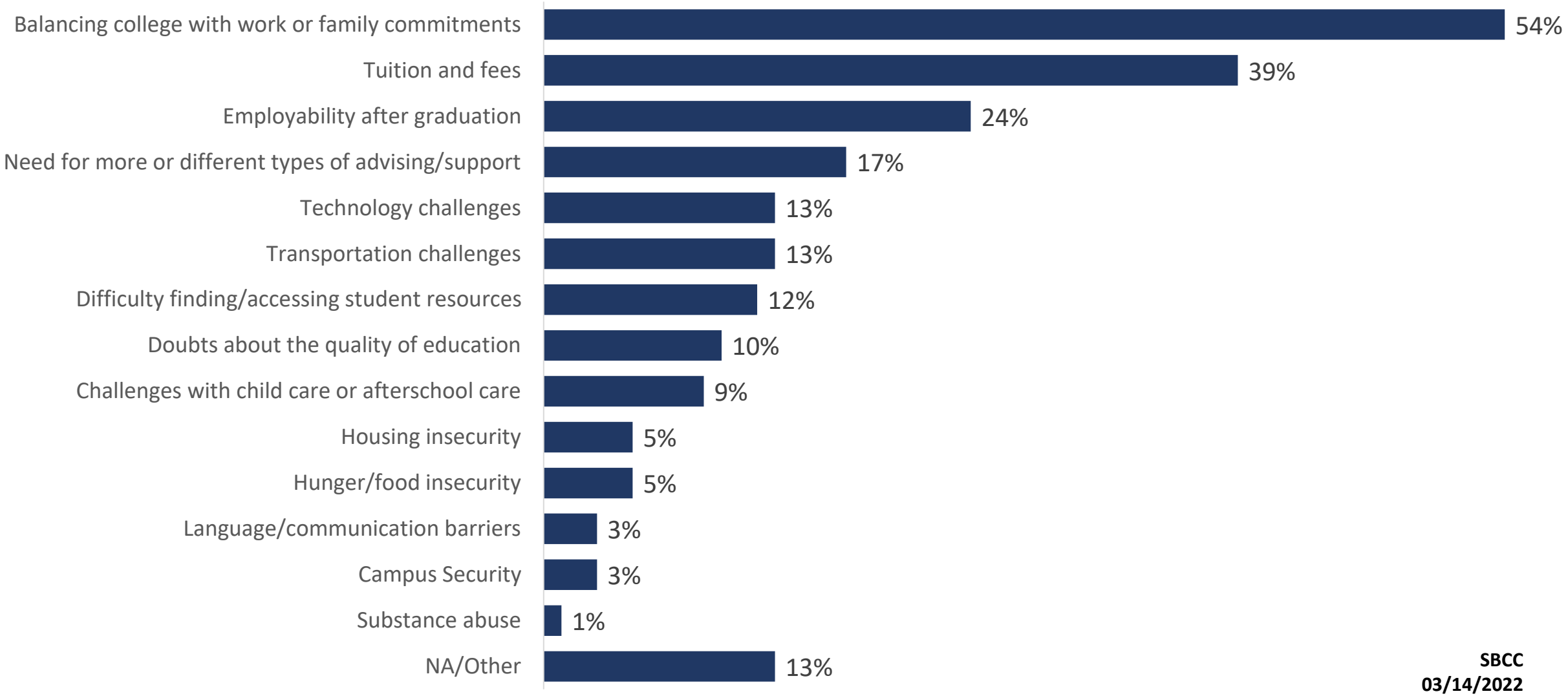

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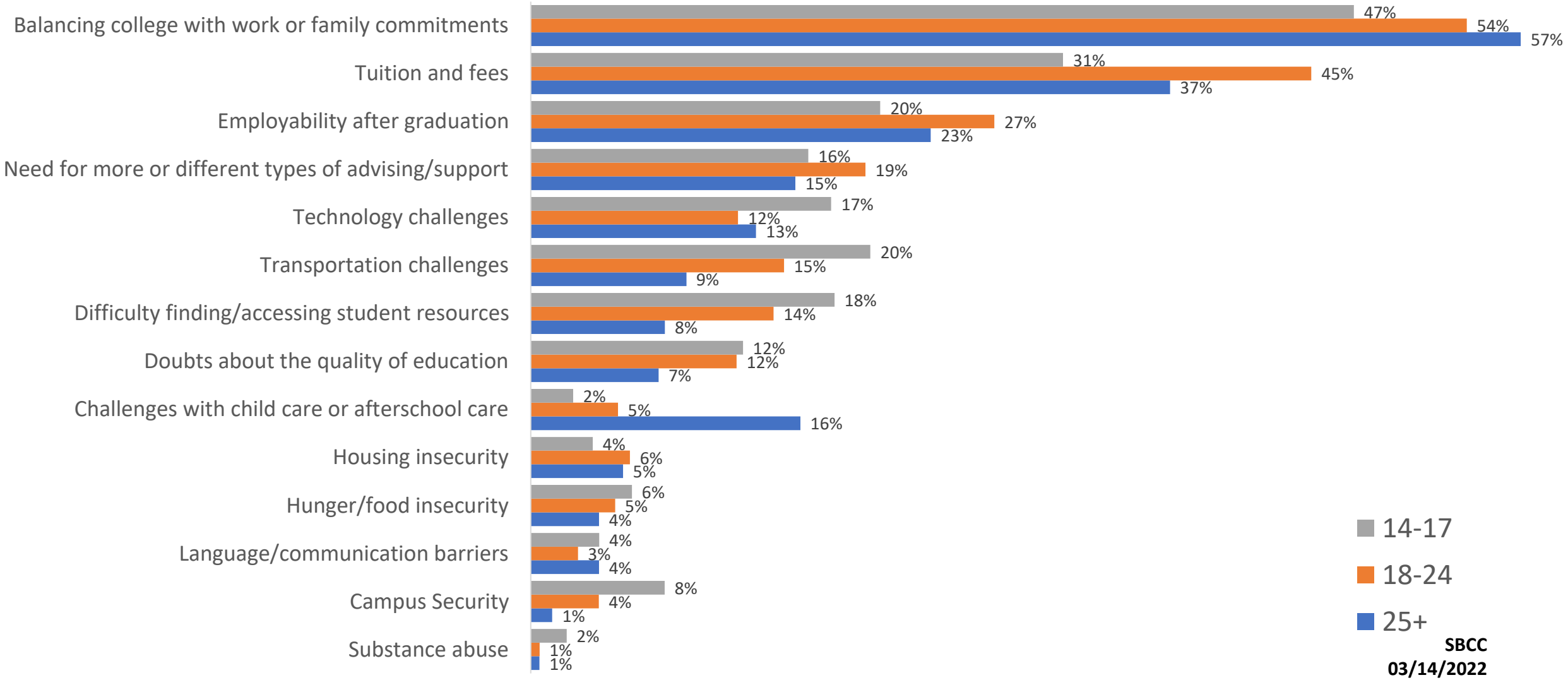

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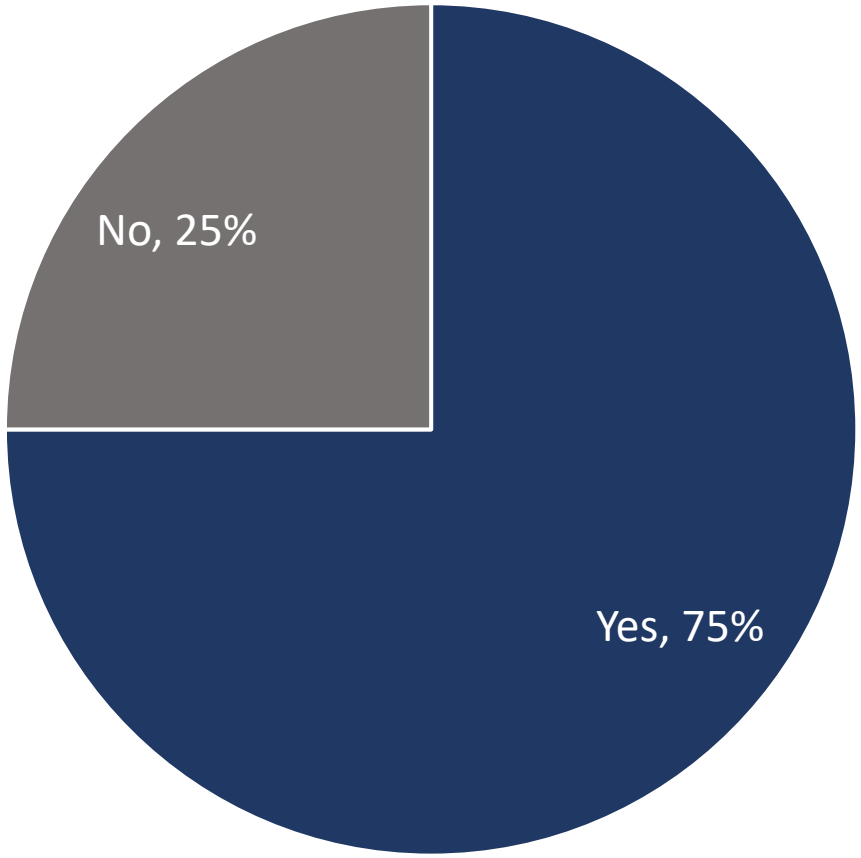

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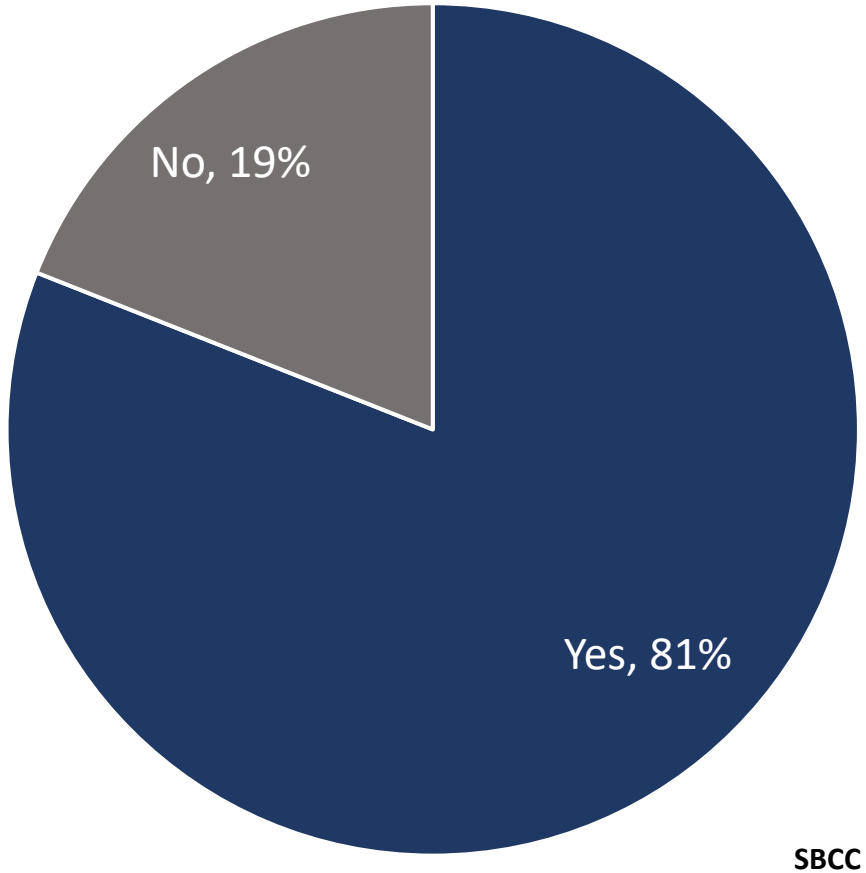

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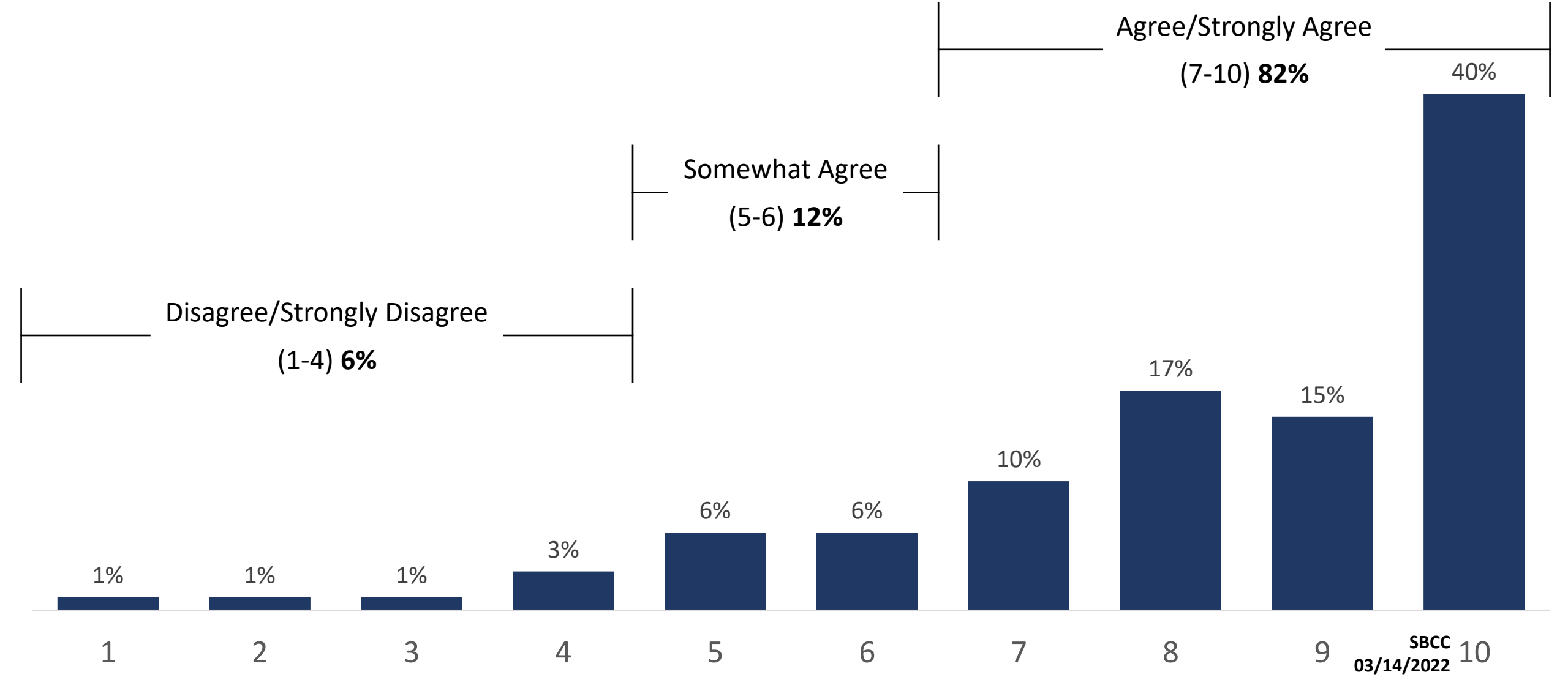

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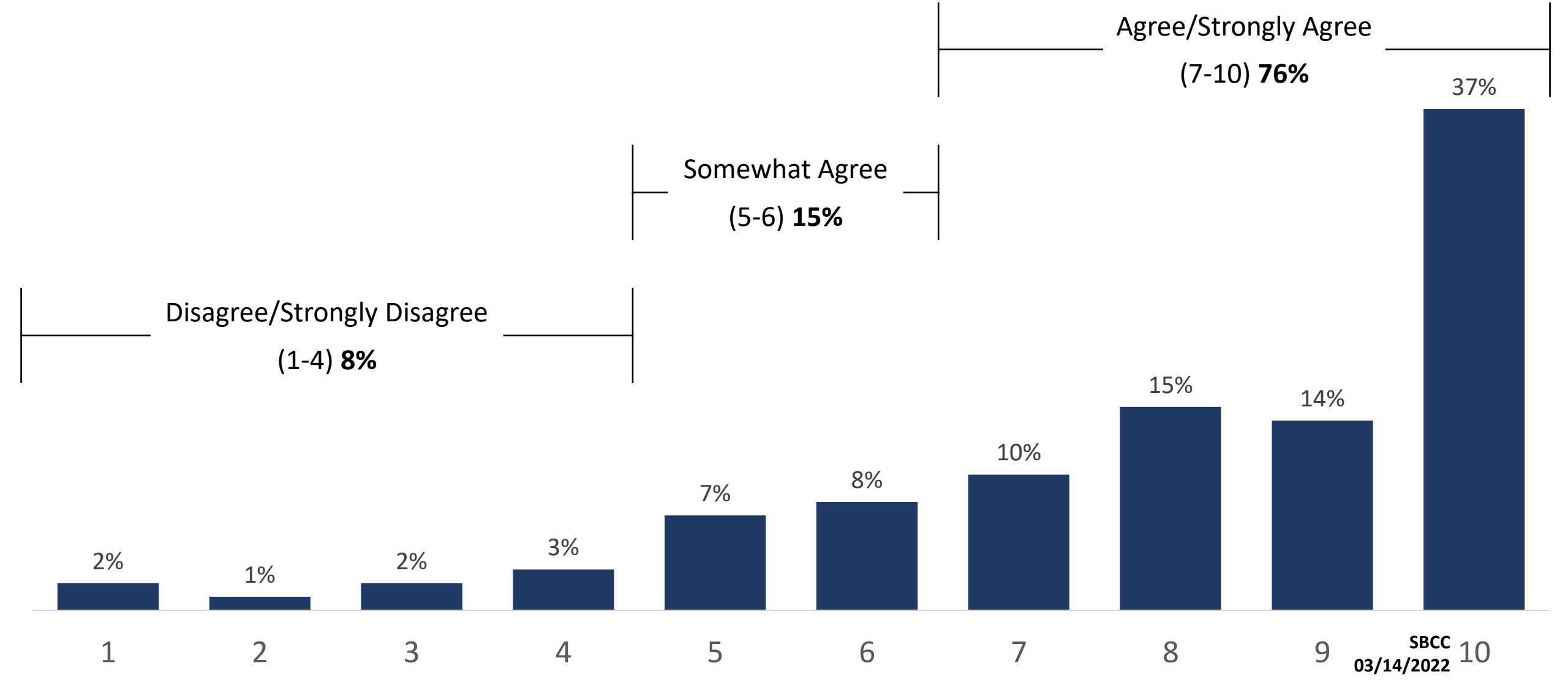

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In summary

Multiple issues, with top two:

- **Balancing college with work and family**
- **Cost**

Some surprises

Caveats

CONGRATULATIONS!