Contra Costa Community College District

Covid-19 Spring 2020 Final Report

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Prepared for

Districtwide ALO/Planning Coordinators

By the

Contra Costa Community College District

Office of Planning and Research

Emma Blackthorne, PhD

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Francisco Balderas, Joy Hakola-Dardin, Rolando Valdez, Helen Wu
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Executive Summary

“We are in this together” has maybe never rung more true. The data shared within this report clearly demonstrates that we are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in ways that have brought us together, not only in perspective but also in the real experienced daily lives of our students, employees, and general community. There is more uniformity in results between distinct populations than has traditionally been present. Stress, anxiety, and future uncertainty is an omnipresent impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Multiple tools were used to assess the impact of COVID-19 on students and employees. In all three survey tools, stress was a prevalent concern among all constituent groups. Comments offered through the open comment areas of each tool included words like grief, loss, overwhelmed, inability to concentrate and focus, as well as mentioning financial support, employment aid, and child care services as contributing factors to the stressful situation.

While there is moderate evidence for unmet technology needs among the student population, this was not identified as the most significant barrier to continuing courses in a distance education format. Technology was identified as something that was a barrier for many employees working remotely; a finding echoed in the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office and RP Group Employee COVID Impact Surveys.

Across the district, ~70% of students surveyed indicated an intent to enroll in at least one course during the Fall 2020 term, even if it was a 100% online format (CCCCO/RP Student COVID Impact Survey). Those that indicated they did not intend to return cited a strong preference for in person learning environments. The strong desire for an in person learning environment may be in part due to the sudden Spring 2020 transition to online, and that the majority of both students and faculty had no prior experience with a distance education learning environment. The suddenness in transition combined with the unfamiliarity of online learning likely contributed to the significant stress experienced by all of the district’s constituencies.

Similar to what students expressed in both internal surveys, employees expressed difficulties with increased job pressures and demands, managing work-life balance, an inability to collaborate with colleagues, and mental health concerns (CCCCO/RP Employee COVID Impact Survey). Employees also requested consideration for workload reductions/rebalancing and greater flexibility in schedules, employees described the same need for greater flexibility in work schedules and workloads.

Contra Costa Community College District has provided a robust response, and many of the District’s recommendations are already in place or being put in place. Based on the expressed needs and concerns from students and employee constituent groups the following recommendations are offered:

- Anxiety often is a result of trauma, so trauma informed teaching pedagogical approaches may be helpful for student success.
- Access to mental health resources and/or a system for rapid referrals – promoting easy quick access to EAP services for example.
- Share and disseminate information about social support services (EDD, food banks, housing, childcare options, and other types of financial assistance) across all constituent groups.
• Increase knowledge and support for both students and faculty that do not have experience with remote/distance learning platforms.
• Increase technical knowledge and support for employees working from home.
• Provide greater certainty about future work expectations to employees (working from home vs. onsite transition).
• Increase communication about future work expectations to employees.

Introduction

Project Overview

COVID-19 had a profound impact on the California Community Colleges System at every level: students, faculty, and staff. This report focuses on student experiences throughout the Contra Costa Community College District, and where available the experiences of faculty, and staff. The District Research and Planning team used multiple survey tools and tracking methods to monitor the impacts of the pandemic, this report brings those resources together to tell and share the story.

Methodology

Process

The data presented in this report is comprised of research data obtained by multiple tools: three (3) surveys, internal student drop record analysis, and external California Community College Chancellor’s office surveys. Results and analysis are organized into four primary sections: a district level aggregate view, followed by in-depth reviews of aggregated data for each college.

SQL reports were modified and in some cases newly developed to track student initiated drop codes. During the early period of the transition to online learning platform an additional drop code was added specifically to ensure that the research department could track the volume of student drops due to the unanticipated pandemic and the associated required containment strategies employed by the state of California: CO/Cannot participate online. It immediately became evident that the volume of drops was significantly higher in Spring 2020 compared to prior Spring terms. Additionally, the use of the new code (CO) allowed for tracking and analysis to measure differences in drop frequency due to the pandemic.

As the frequency of student initiated drops was increasing; it became apparent that learning more about the why or the context of the student drop was important. Specifically, we determined it was important to understand what if anything changed in the student’s experience that contributed to a student’s inability to participate in an online course. The drop code could allow the team to differentiate if the student could not participate due to lack of access to technology, increased family responsibilities such as homeschooling K-12 children, changes in work schedules, etc. The team, colleges, and district needed to know how to specifically assist students to stay on path and generate in course successes. This resulted in a phone interview style survey. Each college was provided a list of students that initiated a “CO” drop, students were contacted via phone by a college representative.
A second survey was developed to reach out to all students including those that did not drop courses, this effort recognized that not all students that experienced new and increasing struggles would drop courses. Some students would choose to continue despite the adversity, yet there are opportunities for the colleges and district to employ/deploy strategies that might lessen the overall impact of those barriers. This survey was open to all students enrolled at that time to respond.

Near the conclusion of the Spring 2020 term the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s office approved and distributed a survey crafted in partnership with the Hope Center and the RP group. This survey sought to illuminate both the student and faculty/staff experience. Some of the student questions were similar to those in aforementioned internal student surveys, however, the CCCCO survey included similar questions for employees to respond to.

Bringing together these four resources and the data elements they produced has resulted in a robust and rich picture of the experiences and challenges encountered by the Contra Costa Community College District community at large.

Analysis of the Results

2. The detailed charts presented in this document are taken from dashboards shared with each college through the weekly production of localized reports. 4CD Detailed Covid-19 Tracking Drop Reasons.
3. Survey data has been shared with local college research teams; blank surveys are attached to this document as appendixes.
4. This report functions to illuminate districtwide trends related to the COVID-19 impacts on students and employees. The report is kept at a high level with data aggregated at the district and college level. Granular reports may be developed locally by college institutional effectiveness departments to address specific localized questions.

Definitions and Terms

**Drop Reason Code**: Codes used and selected by administration, faculty, and students as the “cause” or source of a student course drop. There are 23 different “reasons” that can be attributed to a student course drop (Figure 2).

**Drop Reason Code Groups**: Tracking 23 drop codes proved to be unruly and difficult to convey as a clear story. To clarify drop codes we grouped the 23 codes into 4 main groups (Figure 1). This allowed us to compare how frequently the codes were used in prior terms to the Spring 2020 term and allows for tracking the impact/frequency of the new ON code used specifically for the online transition.
District Overview

Students with Confirmed Drops

All student drop reason code groups were monitored throughout the Spring 2020 term. Number of records shown are the total number of instances a student dropped a course section – that is, there are duplication of students since one student may drop more than one course. These numbers can be compared to total enrollments, not unduplicated headcount.

This report focuses in on student-initiated drop with the reason code, “cannot participate online” (Figure 1); however, for comparison, Figure 7 shows all drops and compares Spring 2020 to Spring 2019. Figure 3, below, shows a monthly break down of the “CO” drops with an aggregated total of 5,059 instances of students dropping a course section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2020SP</td>
<td>708</td>
<td>2,435</td>
<td>1,916</td>
<td>5,059</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A peak in student drops, drop reason code “CO” occurred on May 15, 2020 with a total of 366 drops on this single day.

Additional analysis was conducted to evaluate any disproportionate impact on any specific population of students, for this analysis unduplicated student IDs (SSC Student) were used to establish the ratios. This includes race/ethnicity and gender student attributes. It is evident that minority populations generally were disproportionally impacted. In particular, the Hispanic population throughout the district had the highest frequency of “CO” course section drops. Figure 5, below, presents the ratios of student section drops with the reason code “CO” by student attribute of ethnicity/race.

![Figure 3: District Aggregated Monthly “CO” Reason Code Drops](image3)

![Figure 4: District Aggregated Drop Reason Code “CO” March - May 2020](image4)

![Figure 5: District Aggregated Ethnicity/Race of all “CO” drops](image5)
A disproportionate impact is observable in the data in terms of ethnicity and race, whereas gender ratios are in line with normal averages and reflect the larger community gender ratios. Thus, at the aggregated district level disproportional impact is not observed. Gender ratio is further explored in each college’s dedicated section and is compared to the aggregated gender ratio at each college to determine if there is a localized disproportional impact.

In general, the volume of drops, both student-initiated and administrative/faculty initiated drops were significantly higher during the COVID-19 transition to the online learning environment (Figure 7). In the unique circumstances of Spring 2020, students were permitted to drop courses until one week prior to the end of the Spring term. This is of important note for Figure 7, where the prior Spring term is used for comparison, and partially accounts for the difference in student drops beyond the more traditional deadline.
Survey Results: Students with Confirmed Drops

The quantitative data above demonstrates that COVID-19 had a profound impact on students. However, the data could not answer critical questions about the specifics of the student’s lives that contributed to their inability to continue with online education. In particular, colleges needed to know what resources students needed, or what about online education was not compatible with their lives – we needed to answer the question, is there something the colleges or the district could do to remove barriers or support students differently during these unprecedented times.

The survey was developed in partnership with the college Institutional Effectiveness departments, and borrowed normed questions that were used throughout the state developed and shared by the RP Group. The survey was comprised of eight (8) questions aimed to understand the student’s current situation, and underlying reasons for their dropping of courses. The surveys were conducted by phone with a local college representative recording student responses. The survey collected quantitative and qualitative data elements. Qualitative data is presented as general themes aggregated to the district level. Districtwide 695 students participated in the survey, a 14% response rate.

Stress was a prevalent theme in the quantitative and qualitative data. Student’s reported higher levels of negative impacts from stress than in other categories such as general health, household finances and the household in general.

![Figure 8: District: Q2 Student Drop Survey](image)

The qualitative analyses of the comments for this question also show that students are experiencing a high degree of stress. Students specifically state they are in stressful situations by using stress related terms. The sentiment of stress related often to household finances. Other mentions of stress include uncertainty about the future in general, to uncertainty in the student’s choice of academic interest (future professions), or in relation to caring for family and children.

When asked if students were struggling to meet basic needs, the majority reported as having access to what they needed. However, the qualitative analyses of the comment data reveal high stress levels and future uncertainty with employment.
Question four (4) asks students directly, what the underlying motivating factor to dropping courses. The responses indicated a strong preference for in person learning formats, and too many other life issues that require attention. This was evident in both the quantitative and qualitative data. Additionally, and related to the preference for in person formats, were student comments about the why the online format did not appeal to them. Themes from the comments included:

- Course subject did not transition well into an online format (yoga, ceramics, math, and hard sciences).
- Faculty related concerns were also prevalent in the qualitative data: increasing the workload, lack of availability or response from faculty, lack of familiarity with the online system.
- Home environment was not conducive for learning: lacking space to study in the home, stress of the circumstances, changes in employment and working hours, and young children at home.
The next question (Figure 11) focused in to discover whether there were specific technology related barriers to student’s participation in the online course format. The majority (~50%) of the responses indicated technology was not the primary barrier. However, compared against the qualitative data, the technology needs expressed were for laptops and access to high speed internet, which does align with the quantitative responses.

In addition to technology barriers, students were asked what challenges they experienced in relation to the transition to online learning. Students indicated that they struggled to access academic support resources, such as tutoring or peer learning, or faculty support outside the classroom; and experienced difficulties coordinating communication with their faculty member. This was supported by the qualitative themes as well, where students provided additional comments regarding increased workload, challenges reaching out to or hearing back from faculty, or being unclear on how they were expected to complete course requirements. Students that selected “other” provided comments about difficulties with Zoom, Canvas, and had a strong preference for in person learning. An additional theme included the need for services, such as childcare, library, and access to additional financial resources.
The last two questions of the survey were student response to the following questions:

1. Was there anything the college could have done to help you remain in your classes?
2. Is there anything else you want to share with us regarding why you dropped your courses?

The qualitative analyses for these questions provided the following themes:

1. Faculty or course content/requirements related concerns, many indicated an increase in work, and difficulties with communication
2. Nonacademic reasons were also frequently provided: stress, childcare, and work (both lack of employment, and increases in work)
3. Among these students a prevalent response included a strong preference for in person learning formats.

Student Internal Survey Resource Needs

The student resource survey focused on discovering what students need to support their success during the Summer and possibly Fall terms if online learning continues. This survey was available to all students; 1,423 students districtwide responded to the survey, roughly a 4% response rate.

The survey consisted of 16 questions, two questions are not included in the analyses that follows. Question one asked student to self-select their primary campus, which enables the research team to disaggregate the data by campus location and share results with each college specific to localized student needs. The final question asked for students to voluntarily provide their student ID in the case a specific need could be met by the local campus.

The first question asked students if they felt they were receiving sufficient information from the college, 67% responded positively, with 33% indicating they were not well informed.

![Figure 13: District: Q2: Resource Needs Survey](image)

To ensure that colleges were reaching students, we asked where students prefer to get information. Student email, Insite, and text messages were the three top methods students prefer to receive information.

![Figure 14: District: Q3: Resource Needs Survey](image)
In line with the Student Drop Survey it was important to get a sense of how students were doing overall. The survey asked students to respond with Good, Bad, Okay, and prefer not to answer to how they are doing in general, stress, finances, and general health. Similar to the previously discussed survey, stress was/is significantly impacting students.

![Figure 15: District: Q4: Resource Needs Survey](image)

Understanding that there would be multiple areas in which stress, health, and finances could be negatively impacting student’s lives, additional information was gathered about specific barriers students were encountering. Loss of income was the most prevalent in the quantitative results. In the qualitative data, general stress, anxiety about the future were the most common responses.

![Figure 16: District: Q5: Resource Needs Survey](image)

While developing this survey, we hypothesized that this could have been a student’s/or a faculty member’s first experience with distance education. In light of that, we wanted to discover key areas in which local experts could support both students and faculty members in developing their distance education skills. Student’s generally felt that many courses did not transition well into the distance education format. No other clear themes on barriers emerged;
however, student provided generally positive perceptions that faculty were supportive, and helpful. The qualitative results expanded on this, comments about yoga, ceramics, math, and lab courses were the predominate subjects mentioned by students that did not transition well, and clarified the mixed reaction to “Instructors described their expectations for online courses” indicating that they experienced an increased workload, or lacked access to office hours or other forms of academic support.

Figure 17: District: Q6: Resource Needs Survey

Question 7 and 8 were qualitative questions:

- What online course activities best helped you learn skills/information about the subject/topic?
- Is there anything that did not work well in the transition to online learning?

The qualitative responses indicated that canvas and zoom were helpful tools to support the transition to an online learning platform. Feedback regarding use of Youtube.com, TED talks, and other online education tools was mixed – some students expressed feeling that those resources contributed to the feeling of support for success, others described these tools as forcing students to learn unguided on their own.
Not all barriers for student success were academic issues, many barriers students were facing were socio-economic, the number of distractions in homes or lack of effective study space, and general stress/psychological demands of a pandemic. The primary non-academic barrier reported by students was an inability to concentrate on school, and caring for other family members.

Students report they generally feel prepared to continue their education in a distance education format, this is further supported by the CCCCO/RP Student COVID Impact Survey, where 70% of students indicated they intended to enroll in at least one course during the Fall 2020 term.

Question 11 is also a qualitative question:

- If you do not feel prepared for Summer and/or Fall terms, what can the college/district do to help you prepare?
There were a few comments that additional support for high speed internet access, and laptops were needed. However, most students indicated that the reasons for not being prepared was related to financial, employment, childcare, or other services that could not be provided by the college/district.

For services that are provided by the colleges/districts the following were services students identified as being essential support for continued distance education. Counseling and academic support were selected as significant service needs.

![Figure 20: District: Q12: Resource Needs Survey](image)

Question 13 concluded with an open-ended qualitative question:

- Is there anything else you want to share with us regarding your preparation and how we can support you for Summer/Fall 2020 terms
  - Sentiments primarily reflected the student’s understanding the district and colleges were limited in how to respond to the COVID pandemic. The other emergent themes included a strong preference for in person learning, and recommendations for increased distance education training for faculty and students.

Employee CCCCO/RP COVID Impact Survey

The survey was distributed to district and college employee population near the conclusion of the Spring 2020 term. The survey data was collected by external tools and the RP group ensured delivery of raw data to the district and colleges. The survey was comprised of 49 questions and included logic progression for specific domains (food and housing insecurity) to drill down for better understanding of the employee’s experiences and circumstances. A number of the questions have been excluded. Questions with less than 50 respondents, or less than 10% of the sample population were automatically excluded, and questions that would not provide greater insight to how the pandemic impacted the employee. Skipped questions will be noted along with a short explanation for the exclusion.
The response rate was about the same as the internal surveys, with 10% of the total employee population (EEO Diversity Report, table 1b for total number of employees) for Spring 2020 participating in the survey.

Questions 1-5 are excluded. They are not directly measuring the impact of COVID on our employees, but establishing consent to participating in the survey and the work pattern of employees (i.e. working at multiple colleges or districts). Question 6, while related to work specifically, grounds the survey in demonstrating a stratified response rate among all employee classifications.

Question 7 is excluded, again unrelated to COVID impacts, and asks for more detail on work.

Questions 8-11 are faculty focused, and not specific to the impacts of COVID. These questions ask faculty members which courses are primarily taught, adjunct vs. full time, general area of teaching, and primary division.

Question 12 is particularly illuminating, 59% of the faculty responses indicated that they had no prior experience teaching online. This aligns with the student impression, where they expressed feelings that faculty were not prepared to transition or were very unfamiliar with the distance education tools or pedagogy. Colleges throughout the state responded to the unfamiliarity of online teaching by hosting training sessions, and providing instructional support through mentorship and other direct support forms. It is understood that this effort will continue through the summer and fall flex weeks at each college throughout the 4CD district.
A significant majority of employees are working exclusively from home and few had any prior experience with remote offsite work. The sudden transition, without prior experience similarly has contributed to anxiety, stress, and forced employees into an unknown working circumstances, the return of adult children to homes, and homes not only became the primary work environment, but also become homeschools for K-12 and college classrooms.

Question 16 and 17 are particularly revealing, in particular when compared to the Student COVID Impact Survey for the same/similar question. Employees see that students are unfamiliar with the online/remote education tools, services, and pedagogy as a technological challenge to distance education, and students responded that faculty members are unfamiliar with the same environment as a significant challenge to distance education (Student CCCCO Survey). Given that both populations self-reported having limited or no prior experience with distance education or working from home, it is likely that for both populations the relative inexperience compounded the difficulties and challenges.
Faculty and staff were asked to identify the key areas where they experienced challenges to transitioning courses to a distance education format. Faculty and staff align with the student preference for in person learning environments. Additionally, they identify that student engagement has declined, their ability to create a sense of community among students in courses, and that course lessons and activities did not translate well into a distance education format as significant barriers.
Faculty and staff that identified as providing direct student support also indicated that student engagement declined. This is an area for exploration. Faculty and staff indicating a decline in engagement, and students asking for more support or an inability to access support. It appears that students are desiring to be engaged at previously seen levels but have encountered an unidentified communication barrier. A recommendation would be to examine the delivery process for services: is it well known how to reach services remotely, did the process change, is there a new technology that is relatively unknown, are a few of the questions this researcher had in viewing and comparing the data.
Faculty report feeling very comfortable with Canvas, which illuminates that the difficulties experienced in transitioning courses, or engaging with students possibly unrelated to the Canvas platform. Faculty may not be familiar or aware of all the Canvas communication tools or the intricacies of Canvas.

Faculty and students agree on preferences for delivery of future courses. Faculty indicated that a hybrid or pre-recorded lecture model would be their preference for future terms.
Faculty and staff reported a high need for additional technological support (software access, communication tools, and computers).

![Figure 33 CCCCO/RP COVID Employee Survey](image)

Similar to students, faculty and staff struggle to access electronic files stored on local machines, and reliable high-speed internet. Access to reliable internet services and a steady bandwidth is critical for carrying out distance education. Without reliable access remote live lectures are difficult if not impossible, uploading pre-recorded video may or may not work without corrupting the file, and intermittent access to essential files layers frustration on to an already difficult and stressful situation.

![Figure 34 CCCCO/RP COVID Employee Survey](image)

Similar to students work schedule and workload flexibility is at the top of the list of what employees and students are needing during the unprecedented times of COVID-19. Comments provided in response to this question included consideration of the demands on employee’s homes accommodating school aged children learning environment, and other family members also working from home.

Communication is also crucial to ensuring that anxiety of the unknown is not a consistent distraction to focusing on work. Providing regular updates on future work sites and schedules, when possible provide at least short term (semester to semester) definitive plans allowing for employees to organize one area of their lives.
While employees ask for more communication about key topics such as return to onsite work updates and updates on legislation, shut-downs, transitions, and resources for students, employees agree that the District and Colleges convey a sincere sense of appreciation and understanding. That appreciation and understanding is reflected in the decisions made by the District and Colleges.

Questions 27-38 were excluded as food and housing insecurity was not a prevalent concern among the employee sample population. The logical progression questions about food insecurity included less than 15 responses. Noting that food insecurity at any rate is cause for concern, the focus in this report is on significant unifying themes about the COVID impacts. It is recommended that food and housing insecurity resources be shared also among the employee population.

Similar to students, employees are experiencing a high degree of stress and anxiety. There are seven parts to question 39, each part of the question has been separated out into independent charts. The most frequent responses to each of the seven stress indicators were “over half the days” and “several days”.
Understanding what employees are worried about, what are the underlying causes for feeling anxious from several to nearly every day, can assist in finding ways for the District and College to assist in reducing the overall strain of the pandemic experiences. The three areas of greatest worry are: health and well-being of friends and family, what the future holds for the college, and the health and wellbeing of students.

Figure 37 CCCCO/RP COVID Employee Survey

Figure 38 CCCCO/RP COVID Employee Survey
Of course, not feeling successful in a work environment can create a great deal of personal consternation and add to the stress of the overall situation. With an economy in recession, joblessness increasing, and uncertain state budgets, employee anxiety about keeping up with work demands and maintaining a high level of work performance creates a sense of heightened stress and worry about becoming one of the many newly unemployed persons.

Questions 42 – 44 are excluded. These questions are open ended qualitative responses, and require detailed qualitative analysis. The CCCCO and RP group have indicated they will be providing a descriptive report to include qualitative response analysis, the estimated date of release has not been provided as of the writing of this report.

Questions 45- 49 are demographic information about the survey participants. Included here are race/ethnicity, gender, and age. Additional demographic information is available, and accessible through the report link provided at the beginning of this section.
Conclusion

There is a high degree of uniformity among all the survey tools. Employees and students alike are experiencing stress and anxiety about the future, and are assessing their ability to meet pre COVID-19 performance expectations. The community at large has indicated a need for reassuring messages that address their concerns about flexibility in work and school performance expectations.

In preparation for conducting future terms through distance education and work from home models, mental health, food, and housing will likely be significant challenges across all segments of the population. As a district, keeping a close eye on the national agenda and programs will be critical in our ability to respond to change and provide information about resources that will likely be in demand. These specific insecurities will be significantly impacted by Congress’ ability to pass a new stimulus relief bill, and whether funds will be made available to individuals and states.