

# Transportation Security: Evidence from the 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey

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## Key Findings

- According to the Fall 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS), students with unreliable cars were more likely to miss class due to a lack of reliable transportation than their peers.
- Personal vehicles are often the only option for students to get to campus reliably at two-year institutions.
- Students who reported often or always using public transportation were more likely to be financially insecure.
- Students who were provided transportation by their institution earned better grades and attended classes more frequently.



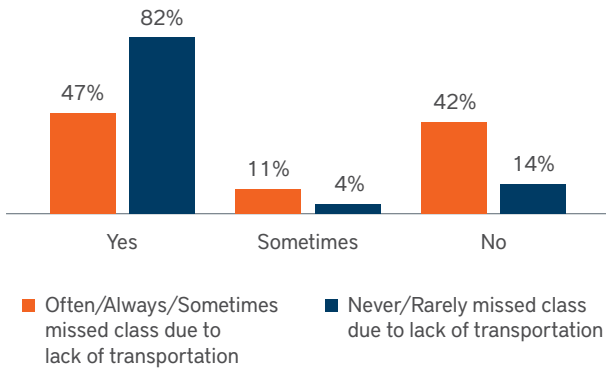
## Transportation Security

Consistent transportation to and from campus is crucial to student success. Inaccessible, inconvenient, and unreliable transportation poses a real threat to the academic success of college students around the country. Particularly for students utilizing public and active transportation types, barriers exist that prevent students from fully participating in their on-campus education. Many of these students are those with the most to gain from engaging with their peers and faculty in on-campus settings. Increasing the reliability of student transportation options enables students to better allocate their time and thus increase time savings throughout their day. These time savings have the potential to reduce the opportunity cost of attending class. This brief will examine the impacts of secure and reliable transportation in the context of higher education, with a focus on two-year institutions, and identify disparities and shortcomings that may be corrected by community engagement, outreach, and public policy.

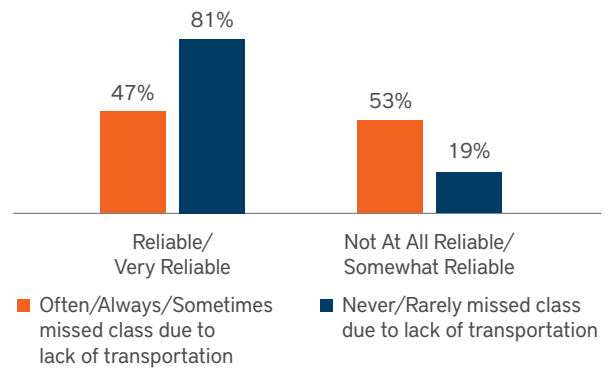
## Reliability

According to the Fall 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey (SFWS), students at two-year institutions who frequently missed class due to a lack of reliable transportation reported not having a car and, when having a car, indicated their

**Q102: Do you have a car?**



**Q103: How reliable would you say your car is?\***



car was somewhat reliable or not at all reliable. Ninety-nine percent of two-year students with unreliable cars used public transportation sometimes, rarely or never, suggesting that students with cars, even if they are unreliable, are using them to get to class. Students who commuted by unreliable cars were more likely to report missing class due to a lack of reliable transportation than peers with reliable cars. Broadly, the SFWS finds that older students, as well as female students, more often have a car than younger students and male students, respectively. In the 2023 SFWS, while 85 percent of white students reported having a car, just 67 percent of Black students indicated the same. Additionally, 70 percent of white students, and 55 percent of Black students, never used public transportation to get to class. Students who are parents are also more likely to have a car.

The association between public transportation usage and both academic and financial stability extends beyond the classroom as well. Students who reported often or always using public transportation were more likely to receive various types of public assistance. This highlights the very real barriers across demographics in terms of accessing college campuses, particularly when talking about personal vehicles. Particularly for two-year institutions, personal vehicles are frequently the only option for students to get to campus reliably and timely.

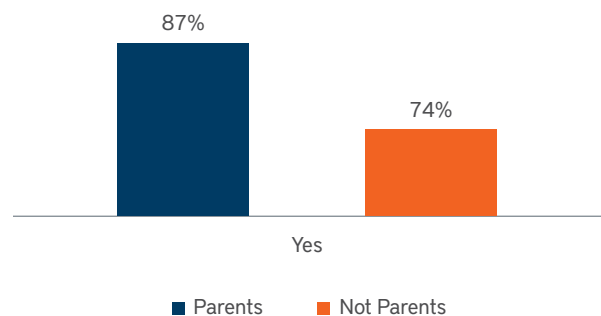
Only 57 percent of community college primary campuses in the United States have transit stops within walking distance.<sup>1</sup> Students in urban environments, with access to public transportation, or living on small-town campuses with high walkability, may be able to overcome these barriers. However, students who find themselves in transportation deserts, locations without transportation options or with infrastructure that highly favors personal vehicles, are those most at risk of being unable to access their education.

### Education Outcomes

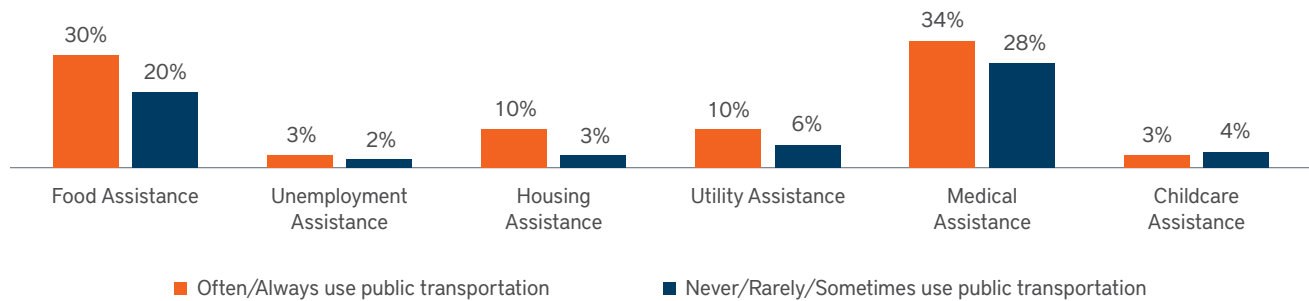
The more time students are on-campus, the better they do in school.<sup>2</sup> Paramount to getting students on campus is ensuring that they can reliably get there on a day-to-day basis. Unreliable transportation, in addition to preventing students from attending classes altogether, has other time costs. Students with less financial stability, who often have fewer transportation choices, may also have time constraints that make transportation increasingly burdensome. Research finds that students with longer commute times are less likely to travel to campus and participate in on-campus activities.<sup>3</sup> Public transportation has been found to take on average 1.4–2.6 times longer than driving a car.<sup>4</sup> Given the relationship between income and public transportation usage, and the



**Q102: Do you have a car?**



### Q51-56: Use of public assistance, by assistance type



increase in time inequality since the 1980s, those students with the longest commute times also are likely those most time impoverished.<sup>5</sup> Time poverty has been associated with lower well-being, physical health, and productivity.<sup>6</sup>

Limited research exists measuring the effects of transportation on academic outcomes. This research has found though, that students with access to reliable, affordable transportation are more likely to stay in school, perform well in class and graduate from school. Research has demonstrated that students who were provided transportation by their institution earned better grades and attended classes more frequently.<sup>7</sup> Another study found that community college students receiving free public transportation passes were more likely to be enrolled in the subsequent semester, one year later, and to have earned a credential during the study period. Overall, researchers found a 27 percent gain in the likelihood of earning an associate degree for students receiving transit passes.<sup>8</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, awareness of the various transportation security concerns students face when commuting to and from campus is paramount to making their college experience as productive as possible. Understanding students' transportation needs, and the factors important to them when choosing a transportation mode, are crucial to understanding their needs in other aspects of life. These transportation decisions, often made as a result of other financial or time-related factors, drastically influence the ability of students to participate and excel in their post-secondary education. Understanding these complex needs, colleges and universities are better able to help students with security concerns and adapt to meet their needs.

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## Trellis Research Publications

### Supporting Our Young Parents: Evidence from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Gardner, T. (2023). *Supporting Our Young Parents: Evidence from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey*. Trellis Strategies. Retrieved from: <https://www.trellisstrategies.org/research-studies/supporting-our-young-parents/>

### Navigating College and Parenthood: Insights from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Cornett, A. (2023). *Navigating College and Parenthood: Insights from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey*. Trellis Strategies. Retrieved from: <https://www.trellisstrategies.org/research-studies/navigating-college-and-parenthood/>

### Financial Wellness Among Younger College Students: Insights from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey

Fletcher, C. (2023). *Financial Wellness Among Younger College Students: Insights from the Fall 2021 Student Financial Wellness Survey*. Trellis Strategies. Retrieved from: <https://www.trellisstrategies.org/research-studies/financial-wellness-among-younger-college-students/>

### Student Financial Wellness Survey report: Fall 2021

Fletcher, C., Cornett, A., Webster, J., & Ashton, B. (2023). *Student Financial Wellness Survey report: Fall 2022*. Trellis Company. Retrieved from: <https://www.trellisstrategies.org/research-studies/student-financial-wellness-survey-sfws-fall-2022/>

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