CARES ACT IMPLEMENTATION: HEERF FUNDS USAGE AND IMPACT DISTANCE EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES

Prepared for Career Education Colleges and Universities (CECU)

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HIGHER EDUCATION

SECTION I

HEERF FUNDS USAGE AND IMPACT SURVEY FINDINGS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **In December 2020, 263 leaders of career and technical colleges in the United States responded to an online survey inquiring about their experience with CARES Act HEERF funds.**

- **More than half of the respondents (54%) indicate that as of November 1, 2020, their institution has spent 51% or more of its overall HEERF funds on emergency financial aid grants for students when only 50% was mandated.** In fact, 36% of respondents indicate that their institutions allocated **more than 70% to emergency financial aid grants for students**.

- **Of the schools with remaining funds, the majority have less than 50% of the institutional funds remaining to allocate.** Respondents commonly express that reasons for still having unallocated funds are **the ongoing nature of the pandemic** and **taking a conservative approach to students' future needs**.

- **According to the majority of respondents, HEERF funds have had or will have a positive impact on instruction, the student experience, and student success.** In fact, greater than three-quarters of respondents indicate that HEERF funds have had or will have a somewhat or extremely positive impact on **student ability to attend class** (84%), **student ability to complete assignments** (81%), **instructor ability to teach effectively** (81%), **student engagement with course materials** (79%), **student ability to balance work and education** (78%), **student ability to balance family responsibilities and education** (76%), and **accessibility to campus resources** (75%).

INTRODUCTION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Respondents overwhelmingly believe that additional funding approved by Congress for higher education institutions should be allocated to both student and institutional needs (81%).**

- **More than one-third of respondents (35%) report consulting CECU resources when making HEERF fund allocation decisions.** Those who took advantage of CECU resources most frequently **attended/watched a webinar** (89%) and **read an article** (84%) while more than half **interacted with other CECU members** (54%).

- **Nearly one-third (29%) of respondents report using HEERF funds as a main source of financing the <u>immediate</u> transition to distance learning.** However, many more of the respondents' institutions used HEERF funds to **improve the academic quality of its distance education programs** (76%) as well as its **distance education technology** (83%).

- **Participants overwhelmingly indicate that HEERF funds have had or will have a positive impact on distance learning.** If available, participants would use additional funds to further improve distance education programs by **increasing faculty training for delivering online instruction** (69%), **increasing use of technology for clinical/labs** (62%), **enhancing student clinical/lab experience** (61%), **improving the quality of education technology** (60%), and **improving tech support for students in online programs** (60%).
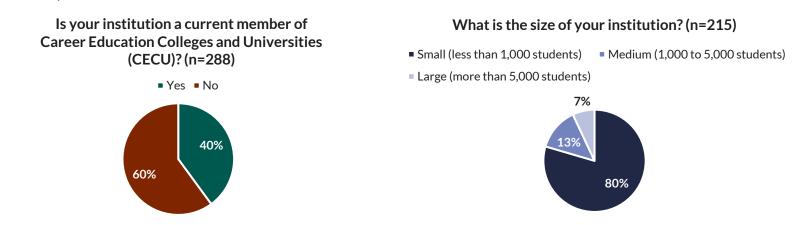
METHODOLOGY

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION & SURVEY SAMPLE

- The survey was administered via email from CECU in December 2020.

- The analysis includes a total of 263 respondents (those who indicated they did not receive HEERF funds did not progress past the initial screening questions).

  - Based on a total population of 2,000, the sample size represents a 99% confidence level with a 7.5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level with a 5.5% margin of error.

- Sample sizes vary across questions as some questions only pertain to a subset of respondents.

- Conclusions drawn from a small sample size (n<20) should be interpreted with caution.

- "Don't Know or Not Applicable" responses, and equivalent, are often excluded from the figures and analysis in order to focus on respondents who did express an opinion.
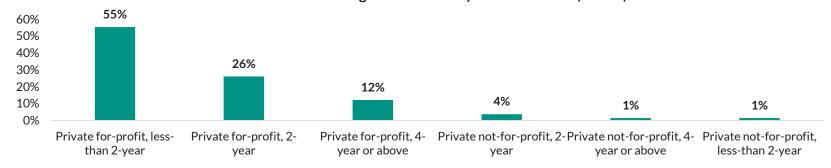
INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

- **Survey respondents represent 42 states with the most frequently selected states including California (15%), Texas (8%), Florida (7%), and New York (5%).**
  - More than half of respondents (60%) indicated that their institution is not a current member of CECU.
  - The majority of responding institutions identify as small (80% less than 1,000 students) and private for-profit (55% less than 2-year, 26% 2-year).

Is your institution a current member of Career Education Colleges and Universities (CECU)? (n=288)

■ Yes ■ No

- 40%
- 60%

What is the size of your institution? (n=215)

■ Small (less than 1,000 students) ■ Medium (1,000 to 5,000 students)
■ Large (more than 5,000 students)

- 7%
- 13%
- 80%

Which of the following best describes your institution? (n=215)

Category	Percentage
Private for-profit, less-than 2-year	55%
Private for-profit, 2-year	26%
Private for-profit, 4-year or above	12%
Private not-for-profit, 2-year	4%
Private not-for-profit, 4-year or above	1%
Private not-for-profit, less-than 2-year	1%

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Note: Total in the bottom chart (99%) is due to rounding aggregated responses.
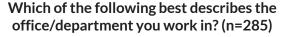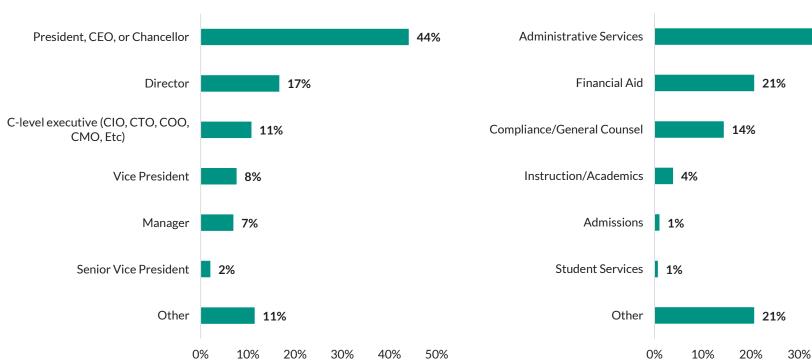
RESPONDENT PROFILE

- **Respondents are most likely to hold the highest-level positions in their organizations with almost half (44%) holding the title of President, CEO, or Chancellor.**
  - Among those respondents who do not work in administrative services, the most represented offices/departments are Financial Aid (21%) and Compliance/General Counsel (14%).
  - Other common written-in respondent positions include Financial Aid Administrator and Owner.

Which of the following best describes your current position? (n=288)

Position	Percentage
President, CEO, or Chancellor	44%
Director	17%
C-level executive (CIO, CTO, COO, CMO, Etc)	11%
Vice President	8%
Manager	7%
Senior Vice President	2%
Other	11%

Which of the following best describes the office/department you work in? (n=285)

Office/Department	Percentage
Administrative Services	39%
Financial Aid	21%
Compliance/General Counsel	14%
Instruction/Academics	4%
Admissions	1%
Student Services	1%
Other	21%

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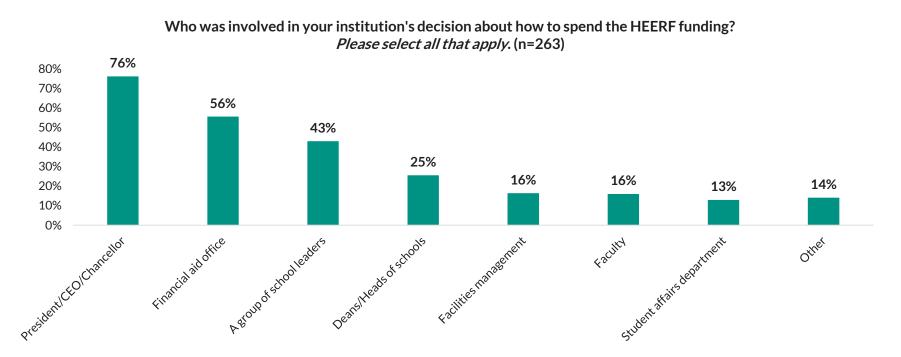Note: Total in the above chart (101%) is due to rounding aggregated responses.

HEERF FUND USAGE

- **The collaborative nature of the HEERF fund usage decision-making process is indicated by the scarcity of participants selecting just one person or office as involved in their institution's decision (15%).**
  - Although decisions relating to HEERF fund allocation are spread across institutions, over three-quarters of respondents indicate that this responsibility lies at least in part with the President/CEO/Chancellor (76%).
  - Other stakeholders commonly involved in the HEERF spending decision-making process include those in the financial aid office (56%), a group of school leaders not limited to one department (43%), and deans/heads of schools (25%).
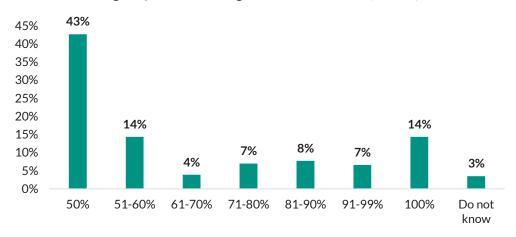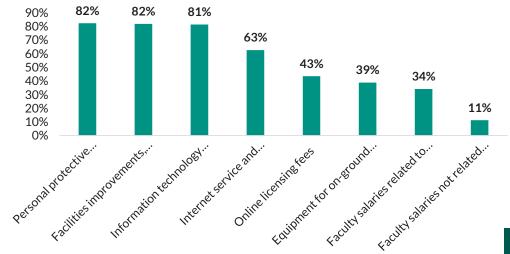
Who was involved in your institution's decision about how to spend the HEERF funding?
Please select all that apply. **(n=263)**

Category	Percentage
President/CEO/Chancellor	76%
Financial aid office	56%
A group of school leaders	43%
Deans/Heads of schools	25%
Facilities management	16%
Faculty	16%
Student affairs department	13%
Other	14%

Note: Totals are greater than 100% since respondents could select as many choices as relevant.

HEERF FUND USAGE: ALLOCATIONS

- **More than half of the respondents (54%) indicate that as of November 1, 2020, their institution has spent 51% or more of its overall HEERF funds on emergency financial aid grants for students when only 50% was mandated.**

  - In fact, 36% of respondents indicate that their institutions allocated more than 70% to emergency financial aid grants for students.

- **The most common uses for the remaining institutional portion of the funds are personal protective equipment (82%), facilities improvements including sanitation (82%), and information technology equipment or software to facilitate distance learning (81%).**

  - Faculty salaries, particularly those not related to distance education (11%), is one of the least allocated expenses for the remaining institutional funds.

As of November 1, 2020, what percentage of your overall funds (i.e., student and institutional portions) has gone to emergency financial aid grants for students? (n=251)

Category	Percentage
50%	43%
51-60%	14%
61-70%	4%
71-80%	7%
81-90%	8%
91-99%	7%
100%	14%
Do not know	3%

As of November 1, 2020, which of the following has your institution used the institutional portion of the funds for? *Please select all that apply.* **(n=214)**

Category	Percentage
Personal protective...	82%
Facilities improvements...	82%
Information technology...	81%
Internet service and...	63%
Online licensing fees	43%
Equipment for on-ground...	39%
Faculty salaries related to...	34%
Faculty salaries not related...	11%

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Note: Totals in the bottom chart are greater than 100% since respondents could select as many choices as relevant.
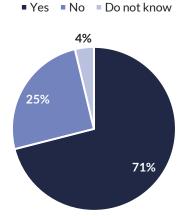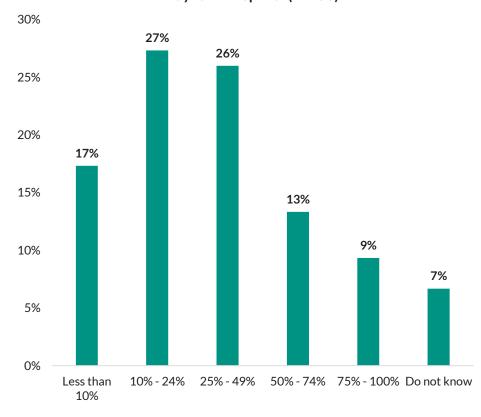
HEERF FUND USAGE: REMAINING FUNDS

- Almost three-quarters of respondents (71%) indicate that their institution still has HEERF funds that have not yet been spent as of November 1, 2020. Of the schools with remaining funds, the majority have less than 50% of the institutional funds remaining to allocate.

As of November 1, 2020, do you have remaining HEERF funds that have not yet been spent? (n=214)

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ Do not know

4%

25%

71%

What percentage of your HEERF institutional funds have not yet been spent? (n=150)

Less than 10%	10% - 24%	25% - 49%	50% - 74%	75% - 100%	Do not know
17%	27%	26%	13%	9%	7%

Note: Total in the above chart (99%) is due to rounding aggregated responses.

HEERF FUND USAGE: REMAINING FUNDS

Why haven't you spent the remaining funds? Please be as specific as possible.

Planning on additional and on-going expenses through May 2021.

Still looking at equipment upgrades required by distance learning before we distribute the remaining to students.

Waiting for guidance from Department of Education on where to apply it.

Waiting to determine where the rest will be needed the most.

Wanted to better understand the needs of students returning to campus, resurge in cases, moving more to online, etc.

Needed to experience more on campus learning and services to understand where funds would most be needed.

The pandemic is ongoing, and we are portioning out the student allocation of the HEERF funds because students might still need emergency assistance. We didn't want to spend it all at once and leave the future students at a loss when the pandemic is still ongoing.

Evaluating and Processing Purchase requests and waiting for guidance from the Department of Education on allowable expense categories.

We want to distribute the remainder to the students in the winter term. We will also be continuing to purchase more PPE and sanitizing equipment for student clinic/lab.

Looking for the best ways to support student learning. Waiting to see if our state will approve a blended learning environment and allow us to add a portion of permanent distance learning.

We did not receive the institutional portion until October 2020. We expect to spend the full amount within the next six months.

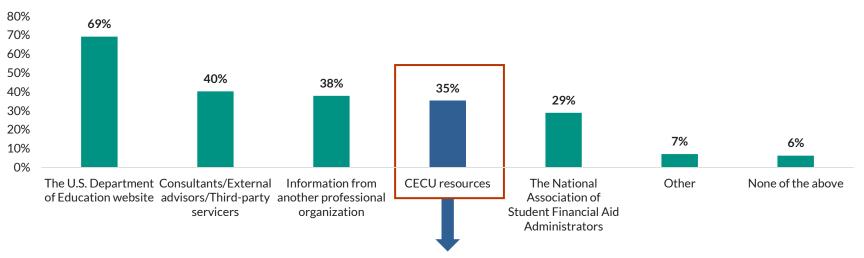Being conservative on the future with uncertainties of future restrictions.
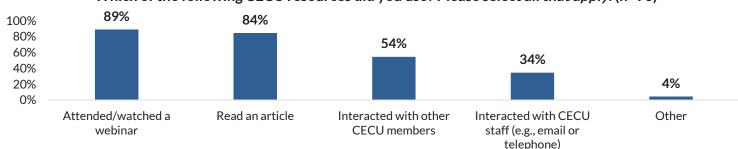
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HEERF FUND USAGE: DECISION MAKING

- **When making decisions about how to allocate HEERF funds, 69% of respondents report consulting the U.S. Department of Education website.**
  - Of the 35% of respondents that used CECU resources, participants most frequently attended/watched a webinar (89%) and read an article (84%) while more than half interacted with other CECU members (54%).

Did your institution use any of the following resources when making decisions about HEERF funding?
Please select all that apply. (n=256)

Resource	%
The U.S. Department of Education website	69%
Consultants/External advisors/Third-party servicers	40%
Information from another professional organization	38%
CECU resources	35%
The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators	29%
Other	7%
None of the above	6%

Which of the following CECU resources did you use? *Please select all that apply.* (n=90)

Resource	%
Attended/watched a webinar	89%
Read an article	84%
Interacted with other CECU members	54%
Interacted with CECU staff (e.g., email or telephone)	34%
Other	4%

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Note: Totals in both charts are greater than 100% since respondents could select as many choices as relevant.
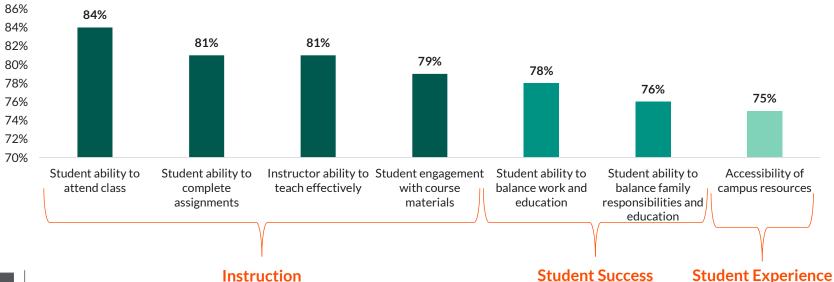
IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDS

- **According to the majority of respondents, HEERF funds have had or will have a somewhat or extremely positive impact on almost all areas of instruction, the student experience, and student success.**
    - In fact, greater than three-quarters of respondents indicate that HEERF funds have had or will have a somewhat or extremely positive impact on student ability to attend class (84%), student ability to complete assignments (81%), instructor ability to teach effectively (81%), student engagement with course materials (79%), student ability to balance work and education (78%), student ability to balance family responsibilities and education (76%), and accessibility of campus resources (75%).
    - The only areas in which fewer than one-half of participants indicate that HEERF funds have had or will have a somewhat or extremely positive impact are student participation in campus events (44%) and ability to host campus events (42%).
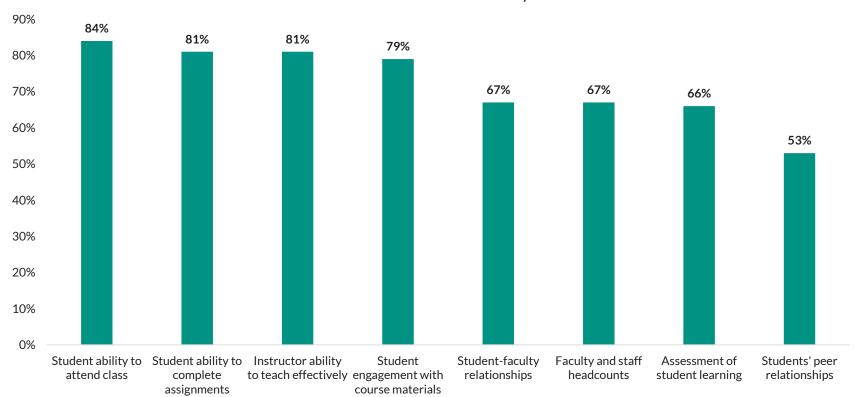
What kind of impact do you anticipate the HEERF funding has had, or will have, on the following? (n=216-218) % Somewhat Positive + % Extremely Positive

Category	Value
Student ability to attend class	84%
Student ability to complete assignments	81%
Instructor ability to teach effectively	81%
Student engagement with course materials	79%
Student ability to balance work and education	78%
Student ability to balance family responsibilities and education	76%
Accessibility of campus resources	75%

Instruction   Student Success   Student Experience

IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDING: ASPECTS OF INSTRUCTION

What kind of impact do you anticipate the HEERF funding has had, or will have, on the following aspects of instruction? (n=218)
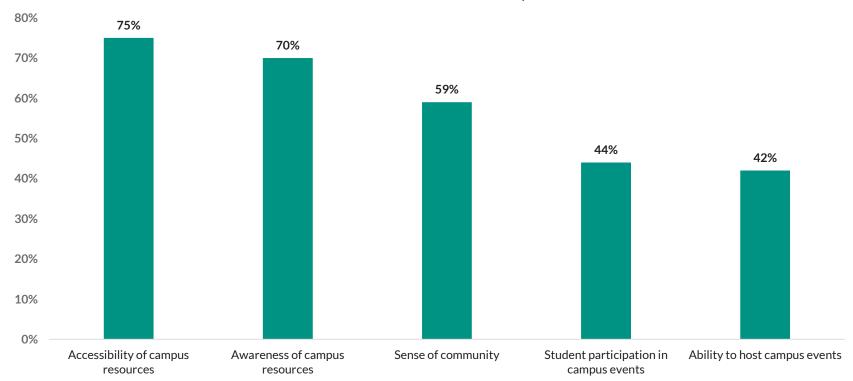% Somewhat Positive + % Extremely Positive

Aspect	Percentage
Student ability to attend class	84%
Student ability to complete assignments	81%
Instructor ability to teach effectively	81%
Student engagement with course materials	79%
Student-faculty relationships	67%
Faculty and staff headcounts	67%
Assessment of student learning	66%
Students' peer relationships	53%

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IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDING: ASPECTS OF THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

What kind of impact do you anticipate the HEERF funding has had, or will have, on the following aspects of the student experience? (n=217)
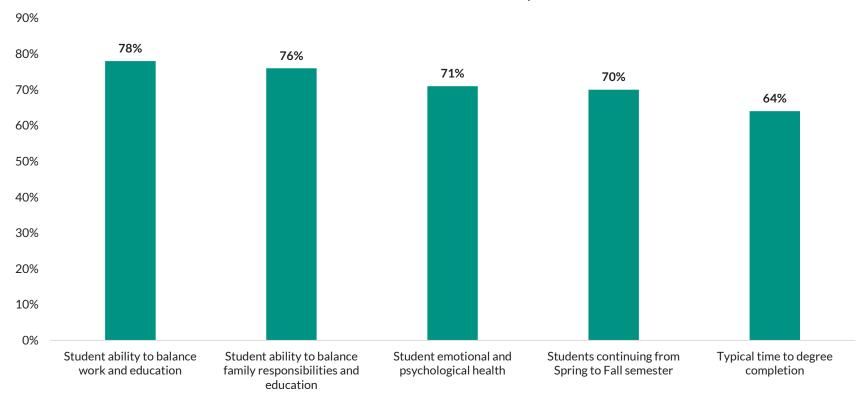% Somewhat Positive + % Extremely Positive

Aspect	Percentage
Accessibility of campus resources	75%
Awareness of campus resources	70%
Sense of community	59%
Student participation in campus events	44%
Ability to host campus events	42%

IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDING: ASPECTS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

What kind of impact do you anticipate the HEERF funding has had, or will have, on the following aspects of student success? (n=216)
% Somewhat Positive + % Extremely Positive

Aspect	%
Student ability to balance work and education	78%
Student ability to balance family responsibilities and education	76%
Student emotional and psychological health	71%
Students continuing from Spring to Fall semester	70%
Typical time to degree completion	64%

IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDING: ADDITIONAL FUNDING

- **Respondents overwhelmingly believe that additional funding for higher education institutions should be allocated to both student and institutional needs.**
  - Additionally, 12% indicate that funds should be directed toward just student needs; however, only 4% indicate the same for just institutional need.

If Congress approves additional funding for higher education institutions, where should that money be directed? (n=203)

■ Both student and institutional needs   ■ Student needs only
■ Institutional needs only   ■ Neither student nor institutional needs

2%

4%

12%

81%

Note: Total in the above chart (99%) is due to rounding aggregated responses.
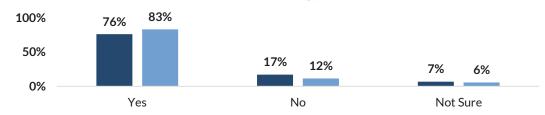
HEERF FUNDS AND DISTANCE EDUCATION

- **The most common sources of funds used to finance the instant transition to distance learning in March 2020 were financial reserves (48%) and reorganizing existing budget (46%).**
  - Nearly one-third (29%) of respondents report using HEERF funds as a main source of financing the **immediate** transition to distance learning. However, many more of the respondents' institutions used HEERF funds to improve the academic quality of its distance education programs (76%) as well as its distance education technology (83%).

How did you finance the instant transition to distance learning in March 2020?
Please select all that apply. (n=256)

Financial reserves: 48%
Reorganizing existing budget: 46%
HEERF funding: 29%
Individual donations/contributions: 2%
Other grant funding: 3%
Other: 9%

Did your institution use HEERF funds to improve... (n=216)

- the academic quality of its distance education programs
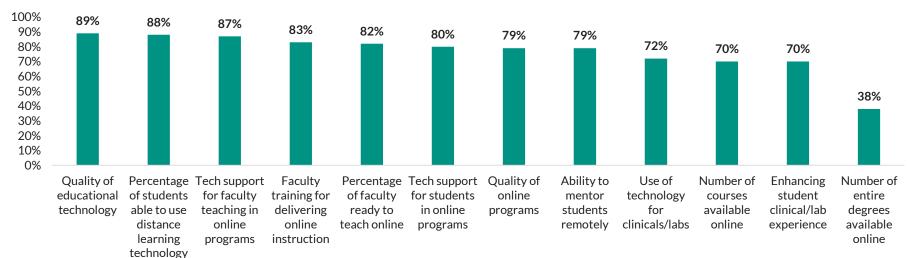- its distance education technology

	the academic quality of its distance education programs	its distance education technology
Yes	76%	83%
No	17%	12%
Not Sure	7%	6%

Note: Totals in the top chart are greater than 100% since respondents could select as many choices as relevant. Total in the bottom chart for distance education technology (101%) is due to rounding aggregated responses.

IMPACT OF HEERF FUNDING: ASPECTS OF DISTANCE LEARNING

- **Consistent with views on other aspects of student success, participants also overwhelmingly indicate that HEERF funds have had or will have a somewhat or strongly positive impact on almost all aspects of distance learning.**
    - If available, participants would use additional funds to further improve distance education programs by increasing faculty training for delivering online instruction (69%), increasing use of technology for clinical/labs (62%), enhancing student clinical/lab experience (61%), improving the quality of education technology (60%), and improving tech support for students in online programs (60%).
    - Respondents indicate that 59% of their institutions intend to continue offering distance education after the pandemic ends, and the large majority (85%) will do so by offering a mix of distance, in-person, and hybrid programs.

What kind of impact do you anticipate the HEERF funding has had, or will have, on the following aspects of student success? (n=184)
% Somewhat Positive + % Strongly Positive

Aspect	%
Quality of educational technology	89%
Percentage of students able to use distance learning technology	88%
Tech support for faculty teaching in online programs	87%
Faculty training for delivering online instruction	83%
Percentage of faculty ready to teach online	82%
Tech support for students in online programs	80%
Quality of online programs	79%
Ability to mentor students remotely	79%
Use of technology for clinicals/labs	72%
Number of courses available online	70%
Enhancing student clinical/lab experience	70%
Number of entire degrees available online	38%

SECTION II

BEST PRACTICES FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

HANOVER RESEARCH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **In September 2020, 15 leaders of career and technical colleges in the United States participated in in-depth interviews conducted by Hanover Research that inquired about their experience with distance education in relation to COVID-19.** Respondents represent small, medium, and large institutions; 14 states across the United States; and programming in a wide variety of areas including HVAC, legal, business, IT, graphic arts, nursing, allied healthcare, healthcare technology, and culinary. Responses are organized by the previous experience of the participant's institution with distance education (minimal, moderate, and advanced).

- **According to participants, the immediate halt to in-person, classroom-based experiential learning and externships was the biggest challenge career education schools experienced as the pandemic forced physical school closure.** The **need for intensive faculty training** was an additional challenge, particularly in traditionally hands-on and lab-based programs.

- **Students commonly adapted to the transition to distance education with ease and enthusiasm.** Participants indicate that career education students can have a reputation for not being good candidates for online learning, but generally they experienced the opposite. Career education students are often older than traditional students, and this **maturity and resourcefulness may have contributed to their adaptability**.

- **Retention levels at the onset of the pandemic maintained, if not exceeded, typical levels.** Though some reported numbers have leveled off to match past years, this initial outcome came at a time when the impact to career education schools was unknown. **Enrollment has also matched or increased** from past years' levels.

- **The return to in-person education was approached with careful adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols.** Among them are **the use of PPE**, **social distancing**, use of **additional machines spread over more classrooms**, and students coming in for **longer but fewer days** at a time.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Schools employed online didactics at the onset of the pandemic with the goal of re-evaluating in January 2021 based on their local situation.** Some schools that previously delivered primarily on-ground programs are **considering incorporating hybrid/blended programming into their permanent course offerings** after seeing success with distance education.

- **Ensuring the quality of distance education, particularly when provided by educators that had little or no previous experience in the delivery mode before the pandemic, is essential.** Key factors include faculty engagement, student engagement, infrastructure, and flexible models.

  - **Faculty engagement**: Training for faculty is essential for online delivery. Schools with robust online programs have **specialized teams dedicated to ongoing faculty training and curriculum design**.

  - **Student engagement: Comprehensive onboarding -** to ensure **online proficiency**, **career and academic advising**, and **retention monitoring -** helps ensure student success.

  - **Infrastructure:** A **LMS is needed** to provide the increased structure an online program requires and **offers capabilities Zoom does not have**. Shells for each class uploaded to a LMS include assignments, message boards, and virtual lab materials.

  - **Flexible models:** COVID-19 amplified the need for **flexibility in operating online programs** and offers an opportunity to **change typical teaching models**. For example, one instructor can teach all lectures sections while another teaches all labs. This aligns with the flexibility provided by new federal regulations aiming to make instructional teams easier to implement.

METHODOLOGY

Hanover Research conducted fifteen (15) in-depth interviews with leaders of CECU member schools.

Note:

Qualitative research is exploratory and designed to add insight and a depth of understanding to
a particular question or topic. Qualitative findings provide commonalities and trends but are not intended to be statistically significant or to provide generalizable conclusions.

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KEY FINDINGS (1/2)

- **The transition to distance education was made within a week at the onset of COVID-19.** All programming possible was moved immediately to an online platform with little disruption to classes.

- **Schools took an immediate response to front-load all theory-based content, putting in-person requirements on hold.** Schools leveraged relaxed federal, state, and accreditor rules to institute simulation software and put students who needed it on temporary leaves of absence.

- **The immediate halt to in-person, classroom-based experiential learning and externships was the biggest challenge career education schools experienced.** The need for intensive faculty training and supporting student transitions were additional challenges experienced.

KEY FINDINGS (2/2)

- **Schools count the tireless response by their staff and faculty as an unequivocal success as they responded to an unprecedented situation.** Academic outcomes have been at or above typical levels, counting as an additional success.

- **Utilizing a robust Learning Management System (LMS) is essential for long-term distance education plans.** The LMS provides the increased structure an online program requires and offers capabilities Zoom does not have.

- **Schools plan to maintain remote learning that was instituted in the spring 2020 until early 2021, when they will re-evaluate the local situation and the extent to which they can re-open campuses.** In person labs have been re-initiated with safety protocols in place alongside continued use of simulations.

- **Successful experiences with distance education have prompted schools to consider incorporating online learning into permanent offerings by their school.**

PRE-COVID USE OF DISTANCE ED

Minimal

Six participants reported little to no use of distance education before COVID-19.

"

"Until COVID we were brick and mortar, in-person education only."
–P5, Minimal

Moderate

Four participants reported some use of distance education. This includes fully online programs and hybrid programs.

"

"25% of our students were online at the time, pre-COVID."
–P12, Moderate

Advanced

Five participants reported a majority of distance education programming before COVID-19.

"

"We offer 80-90% of our courses fully online."
–P2, Advanced

VALUE OF DISTANCE ED EXPERIENCE

Schools experienced with distance education before COVID-19 had a relatively easier transition bringing their in-person programs to a virtual setting.

These schools had an existing online infrastructure that allowed them to quickly scale their model to incorporate programming that was previously offered in-person.

Faculty at these schools were more likely to have experience using a learning management system, or use of hybrid programming meant on-ground students had some experience with distance education and the necessary technology.

" Our transition was, I'm not going to say it was easy, but it was easier, because we already had two programs that were 100% approved for distance ed, and we had two programs that were hybrid. And so the move was just a matter of training the campus teachers how to teach online."
–P4, Moderate

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MINIMAL TRANSITION

Schools responded immediately when it was evident in-person classes could not continue as usual.

- School personnel, especially in schools with minimal or moderate experience, worked tirelessly to make the transition to distance education happen.

- Schools with advanced experience made the switch in as little as a few hours. Schools with minimal or moderate experience made the necessary arrangements within two to seven days.

- Remarkably, schools with moderate or little experience with distance education made the transition with minimal disruption to classes.

"We knew we had to go to an online platform immediately. So within the week, literally seven days, the staff working day and night, we came up with a band aid, which was Zoom. We made sure the teachers were comfortable with it and transcended from there." –P6, Minimal

"Our executive committee and education department literally worked around the clock for more than a week transitioning our thousands of students to alternate delivery. We had basically little to no interruption of the students' programs." –P13, Minimal

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IMMEDIATE SOLUTIONS

Many schools used Zoom as an immediate solution to make the transition happen quickly. Over time, many of these schools incorporated a Learning Management System (LMS) into their infrastructure and rely on Zoom less heavily than they did at the onset of the transition.

All programming that could be transitioned to distance education was moved together.

Delays were experienced for components of programs that require skill development through hands on work in labs or externships, for which schools needed additional planning time, including:

- HVAC (full programs put on hold)
- Allied healthcare
- Cosmetology
- Massage
- Nursing

" *We made the shift for all ground campuses at the same time. So when we made the shift, every single ground student was online."–P8, Advanced*

" *We couldn't have the students on campus. We had to figure it out. So we were doing day-to-day, just-in-time content creation, trying to record it a day or two ahead of time so it could be broadcast just in time for lecture." –P5, Minimal*

INDUSTRY CHALLENGES

Career and technical education often requires lab-intensive programming. Faculty in these programs, while experts in their field, may not have a great deal of personal experience in education outside of lab environments or education pedagogy in general.

The need for significant hands on experiences to be embedded within programs lends to some faculty being inexperienced with distance education and the tools required for this type of instruction. This left some faculty feeling discomfort and needing more time to bring their classes into the remote setting.

"We're talking about experts in their field. But for like residential or commercial HVAC, the faculty you find for that typically are not even degreed. (…) So the challenge we face is to train our faculty and get them up to speed on the tools and techniques needed outside of a lab. And that's true with several of the professions we are in."
–P11, Moderate

"The instructors that were not able to conduct classes right away via distance ed were my LPN program instructors, massage therapy, and cosmetology instructors. (…) We had to make a lot of investment in the instructors before they felt confident in their competency to conduct via distance education." –P14, Minimal

IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES

Experiential Labs

The most significant challenge schools encountered is how to address required externship/clinical experience, particularly for healthcare programs. Campuses shut down labs, and healthcare facilities halted students coming in for clinicals. Because access to facilities is dependent on state and local guidance and need, some schools have experienced a backlog of students that are behind on earning required hours.

"
The biggest challenges have been most of our programs have externships with hospitals, clinics, and urgent cares. So depending on them being open or closed, [for example] when elective surgeries all stopped (...) all of that got delayed.
–P3, Moderate

Faculty Training

Schools also faced the challenge of getting all of their instructors trained and feeling comfortable using the online platforms. Even schools that had some distance education experience did not have all instructors fully trained to teach online. Most instructors acclimated to the change with support, with a small minority being unable to adjust to the transition.

"
Our faculty were not fully engaged with [our LMS system] and all the benefits of the platform. We had to get all of our faculty from online to load what are called shells and have the on-campus faculty engaged in those shells. That was a challenge. There were some of the older faculty who had some challenges with it."
–P2, Advanced

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STUDENT HURDLES

Because career education has typically relied on in-person experiences, some students faced hurdles in the transition to distance learning:

- Some students did not have the technology they needed for online courses and schools needed to provide them equipment. An initial surge in need for technology created potential issues with timely access to equipment.

- A minority of students were simply unable to successfully make the transition to distance education and took a leave of absence from school. Others have stayed in their program but voice frustration to their school about continuing with distance education when they want to return to campus.

- There is also the yet unanswered question of the academic achievement of this class of students and whether they will be able to pass national boards after their distance education experience.

"It was not easy. We have a significant online presence. But to flip the residential campuses, it isn't as easy as one would think. You still have to help with transitioning the students, getting them technology."
–P10, Advanced

"The bottom line is our students want to come back to campus. There is a growing frustration that they signed up for an in-person, hands on experience and that is not entirely available right now."
–P13, Minimal

"We still have the same assessment processes with measuring success. Now, we haven't felt the full impact yet. Those students who were put on leave and haven't been able to complete all of their courses, they have yet to take their national boards."
–P2, Advanced

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CHANGING LABS AND CLINICALS

At the onset of COVID-19, schools took the immediate response to **front load theory and lecture-based courses** for students. This allowed schools to delay labs for the short term and research alternative options.

"At the beginning we decided to only have lecture classes, so we were front-loading all of the didactic and not conducting any labs."
–P13, Minimal

State boards made accommodations for schools to **use simulation software** in order to continue skill development in a virtual environment for healthcare related programs.

"We spent time investigating the various clinical simulation software. It's called Virtual Clinicals. I gave them immediate permission, all my campuses with the nursing program, to purchase what they needed."
–P14, Minimal

Students who struggled with the transition or were senior level and needed an externship were able to **take advantage of relaxed federal rules for a temporary leave of absence**.

"We were able to take advantage of the relaxed approved leave of absence for those students who were coming up on or in externships."
–P8, Advanced
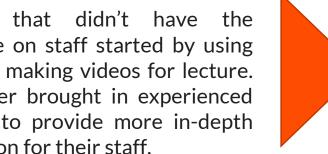
STAFF TRAINING IMPLEMENTATION

Schools experienced with distance education scaled their distance learning technology and leaned on their distance educators to train their on-ground faculty.

- Intensive trainings were held in the beginning of the transition and summer breaks have allowed faculty to get fully up to speed.

- Schools that didn't have the expertise on staff started by using Zoom or making videos for lecture. They later brought in experienced trainers to provide more in-depth instruction for their staff.

"We took a portion of our online university's curriculum development and training team and did a series of very intensive training for those ground faculty, and once we made the shift to fully online, we put in place a mechanism and a resource to support them." –P8, Advanced

"The [on] campus directors had a lack of experience in distance education and how to use the tools. So it was trying to find their way through it (...) until we decided to get serious and bring in faculty with expertise in the area." –P11, Moderate

STAFF AND STUDENT RESPONSE

Given the gravity and level of unknown in the situation, **faculty and staff went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure students needs were consistently met** and faculty received the training and resources they needed in the transition and ongoing.

Students, with a few exceptions, adapted to the transition to distance education with ease and some with enthusiasm. Career education students can have a reputation for not being good candidates for online learning, but participants experienced the opposite. Career education students are often older than traditional students, and this maturity and resourcefulness may have contributed to an adaptability and resilience that allowed these students to rise and meet the moment.

"We're a very small school and so it took the efforts and duties of everyone on board. And under crises, the cream rises to the top, and there was very little here that wasn't cream."
–P6, Minimal

"I think that so many, including me and in our sector, have believed many of our students are not the online learner, and I've got to tell you it's proven it's wrong. They very much can and so a lot of aspects have been very surprising in a good way."
–P13, Minimal

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OUTCOME METRICS

Retention & Enrollment

To the surprise of participants, **retention levels at the onset of the pandemic maintained, if not exceeded, typical levels.** Though some reported numbers have leveled off to match past years, this initial outcome came at a time when the impact to career education schools was unknown. Enrollment at this time has also matched or increased from past years' levels.

"We have had an increase in retention and also an increase in enrollments."
–P6, Minimal

Graduation Rates

Schools are also proud that, despite challenges encountered with labs and clinicals, **graduation rates have been maintained at the levels of previous years.** Staff and student commitment during the crisis contributed to maintaining strong academic outcomes.

"We have an amazing team and they put in the effort to make it run as well as possible. Was it perfect? Absolutely not. But the point is, we have been able to continue to graduate and place people on a regular basis." –P3, Moderate

OPERATIONAL CHANGES

With COVID-19, schools immediately moved to staff providing all major operations remotely:

- Financial aid
- Bursar office
- Recruitment and admissions
- Library services
- Career services
- Student orientation and graduation

Additional responses by schools include:

- Upgrades to phone and computer systems
- Developed or expanded policies for distance work, off site supervision, and classroom expectations
- LMS purchased or expanded use
- Mental health services received additional focus

"We also focused a lot on life coaching and the mental health part of COVID. We wanted to make sure we were checking in to make sure the students were okay." –P10, Advanced

"It's a different kind of management for my leaders. My academic leaders and admissions. When you have people at a distance, it requires a different kind of management style." –P2, Advanced

"Moodle is the LMS. We're making that thing dance. Moodle is deeply involved in what we're doing for sure." –P12, Moderate

SMALL CHANGES FOR FALL TERM

As local lockdowns have loosened across the country, **schools have made conservative allowances for students to return to campus for labs and experiential skill development**.

This is done with careful adherence to COVID-19 safety protocols that include PPE, social distancing, additional machines spread over more classrooms, and students coming in for longer but fewer days at a time.

At the time of the interviews, schools planned to continue with online didactics for the immediate future, re-evaluating in January 2021 based on their local situation. HVAC programs continue to be on hold.

"What we did, in order to maintain social distance, the faculty members come in for a short time each week to meet with students. No more than 12 students in a class. The classrooms are spread out. So a calculation is roughly 25% on campus and 75% online."
–P2, Advanced

"Our didactic programs are online. We expect to continue to be online until at least January. And we've already made applications to go beyond January because we're not sure whether or not we can open."
-P7, Minimal

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LONG TERM CHANGES

Schools are considering long-term adjustments to their course structures, adding more distance education options into their programs than previously offered.

- For some, this was a slow-moving idea that COVID-19 forced into an accelerated implementation plan.

  "If it wasn't for COVID, we would still be having a difficult time making a transition to a blended model. It forced us to progress in technology and processes we were finding it hard to get to." –P11, Moderate

- Others are adding virtual simulations permanently to their programs so that labs can continue to be delivered remotely.

  "Our labs are the practicing of skills that were studied in the virtual environment and happen on the ground. And because we've made this transition, we have applied for these programs to be fully distanced." –P1, Advanced

- Some schools that delivered primarily on ground are considering incorporating hybrid/blended programming into their permanent course offerings after seeing success with distance education.

  "In the midst of this, we've learned a lot and are submitting our application to be a hybrid. We'll do the labs in-person and we'll do some lectures online. The online lecture is going to be an option." –P5, Minimal

CONCERNS FOR THE FUTURE

The all-encompassing transition to remote learning in the wake of COVID-19 has prompted concerns for the future of career education delivered online.

One participant voices concern over the quality of distance education provided by educators that had no previous experience in the delivery mode before COVID-19. Using the technology effectively for remote facilitation requires specialized training. If it is not delivered well, the reputation of distance education may be tarnished as an ineffective delivery model.

"Putting your PowerPoints online isn't distance ed. My worry is that by everybody calling what they've done distance education, if you just put up your slides and you don't have a robust LMS, the outcomes will suffer. (…) And so my worry is that distance education is getting a bad rep."
–P1, Advanced

A second participant worries about the transition children in the K-12 system have experienced. Again, if the delivery of the online experience is not skillfully delivered, children will experience mediocre results, leaving a negative impression of distance learning that they will carry into any post-high school education they seek out.

"You start seeing students that were forced to do an online class because of the pandemic that was haphazardly thrown together. So when they get to college, they would be required to take an online class that they don't want and they may just give up. And I don't want to see that. That's a fear I have." –P11, Moderate

DISTANCE ED BEST PRACTICES

Training for faculty is essential for online delivery. Schools with robust online programs have specialized teams dedicated to ongoing faculty training and curriculum design.

Career education students are often nontraditional learners that need targeted services. Comprehensive onboarding to ensure online proficiency, career and academic advising, and retention monitoring help ensure student success.

Faculty Engagement

Student Engagement

Robust Infrastructure

Flexible Models

A LMS is needed to provide the increased structure an online program requires and offers capabilities Zoom does not have. Shells for each class uploaded to a LMS include assignments, message boards, virtual lab materials, and more.

COVID-19 amplified the need for flexibility in operating online programs and offers opportunity to change up typical teaching models. For example, one instructor can teach all lectures sections while another teaches all of the labs.

APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

- Participants represent small (9), medium (4), and large (2) institutions; 14 states across the united states; and programming in a wide variety of areas including HVAC, legal, business, IT, graphic arts, nursing, allied healthcare, healthcare technology, and culinary.

P#	Experience with distance ed before COVID-19
1	Advanced
2	Advanced
3	Moderate
4	Moderate
5	Minimal
6	Minimal
7	Minimal
8	Advanced
9	Minimal
10	Advanced
11	Moderate
12	Moderate
13	Minimal
14	Minimal
15	Advanced

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Thank you.

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