Survey of Entering Student Engagement

Aiken Technical College

2013 Key Findings

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Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice With Entering Students

SENSE Benchmarks

★ Early Connections

When students describe their early college experiences, they typically reflect on occasions when they felt discouraged or thought about dropping out. Their reasons for persisting almost always include one common element: a strong, early connection to someone at the college.

★ High Expectations and Aspirations

Nearly all students arrive at their community colleges intending to succeed and believing that they have the motivation to do so. When entering students perceive clear, high expectations from college staff and faculty, they are more likely to understand what it takes to be successful and adopt behaviors that lead to achievement. Students then often rise to meet expectations, making it more likely that they will attain their goals. Often, students' aspirations also climb, and they seek more advanced credentials than they originally envisioned.

★ Clear Academic Plan and Pathway

When a student, with knowledgeable assistance, creates a road map—one that shows where he or she is headed, what academic path to follow, and how long it will take to reach the end goal—that student has a critical tool for staying on track. Students are more likely to persist if they not only are advised about what courses to take, but also are helped to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.

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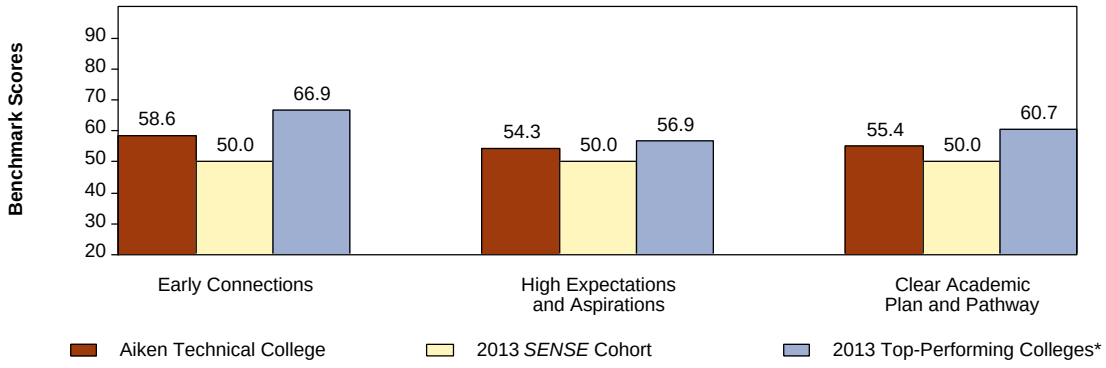
The Survey of Entering Student Engagement (*SENSE*) benchmarks are groups of conceptually related survey items that address key areas of entering student engagement. The six benchmarks denote areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experiences and educational outcomes; thus, they provide colleges with a useful starting point for looking at institutional results.

Ideally, colleges engage entering students in all six benchmark areas, beginning with a student's first contact with the institution and continuing through completion of the first three weeks of the initial academic term. This time is decisive because current research indicates that helping students succeed through the first academic term can dramatically improve subsequent success, including completing courses and earning certificates and degrees.

While many student behaviors and institutional practices measured by the benchmarks can and should continue throughout students' college careers, the *SENSE* items and the resulting data focus on this critical entering student timeframe.

SENSE benchmark scores are computed by averaging the scores on survey items composing the benchmarks. Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and standard deviation of 25 across all entering student respondents.

Figure 1a



*Top-Performing Colleges are those that scored in the top 10 percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Notes: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents. For further information about how benchmarks are computed, please visit **www.cccse.org**.

Benchmarks of Effective Educational Practice With Entering Students

The standardized benchmark scores allow colleges to gauge and monitor their performance in areas of entering student engagement. In addition, participating colleges have the opportunity to make appropriate and useful comparisons between their performance and that of groups of other colleges.

Performing as well as the national average or a peer-group average may be a reasonable initial aspiration, but it is important to recognize that these averages are sometimes unacceptably low. Aspiring to match and then exceed high-performance targets is the stronger strategy.

Community colleges can differ dramatically on such factors as size, location, resources, enrollment patterns, and student characteristics. It is important to take these differences into account when interpreting benchmark scores—especially when making institutional comparisons. The Center for Community College Student Engagement has adopted the policy "Responsible Uses of *CCSSE* and *SENSE* Data," available at **www.cccse.org**.

SENSE uses a three-year cohort of participating colleges in all core survey analyses. The current cohort is referred to as the 2013 *SENSE* Cohort (2011-2013) throughout all reports.

SENSE Benchmarks

Continued from Page 2

★ Effective Track to College Readiness

Nationally, more than six in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. Thus, significant improvements in student success will hinge upon effective assessment, placement of students into appropriate courses, and implementation of effective strategies to ensure that students build academic skills and receive needed support.

★ Engaged Learning

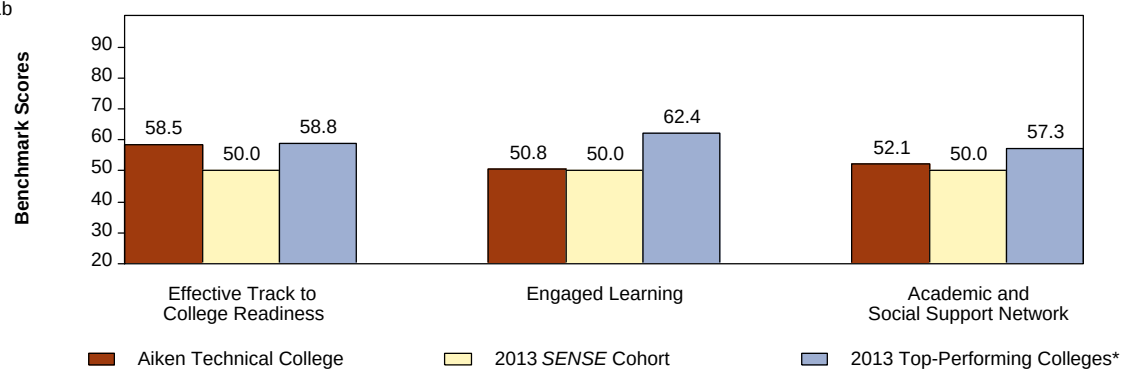
Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Because most community college students attend college part-time, and most also must find ways to balance their studies with work and family responsibilities, the most effective learning experiences will be those the college intentionally designs.

★ Academic and Social Support Network

Students benefit from having a personal network that enables them to obtain information about college services, along with the academic and social support critical to student success. Because entering students often don't know what they don't know, colleges must purposefully create those networks.

For further information about *SENSE* benchmarks, please visit **www.cccse.org**.

Figure 1b



*Top-Performing Colleges are those that scored in the top 10 percent of the cohort by benchmark.

Notes: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents. For further information about how benchmarks are computed, please visit **www.cccse.org**.

Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding *SENSE* data. One way to dig more deeply into the benchmark scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features the five items across all benchmarks (excluding those for which means are not calculated) on which the college scored most favorably and the five items on which the college scored least favorably relative to the 2013 *SENSE* Cohort.

The items highlighted on pages 4 and 5 reflect the largest differences in mean scores between the institution and the 2013 *SENSE* Cohort. While examining these data, keep in mind that the selected items may not be those that are most closely aligned with the college's goals; thus, it is important to review all institutional reports on the *SENSE* online reporting system at **www.cccse.org**.

Figure 2 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed most favorably relative to the 2013 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 50.2% of Aiken Technical College students, compared with 42.3% of other students in the cohort, responded *strongly agree* or *agree* on Item 18f. It is important to note that some colleges' highest scores might be lower than the cohort mean.

Figure 2

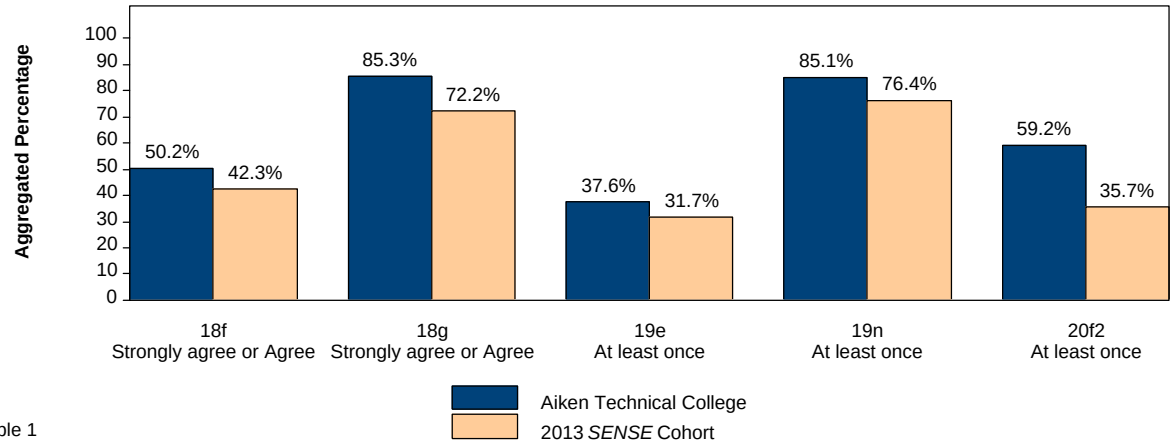


Table 1

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	18f	An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	18g	An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester/quarter
Engaged Learning	19e	Frequency: Participated in supplemental instruction
Engaged Learning	19n	Frequency: Asked for help from an instructor regarding questions or problems related to a class
Engaged Learning	20f2	Frequency: Used writing, math, or other skill lab

Notes:

For Item(s) 18, *strongly agree* and *agree* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 19, except 19c, 19d, 19f, and 19s, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 20, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Figure 3 displays the aggregated frequencies for the items on which the college performed least favorably relative to the 2013 *SENSE* Cohort. For instance, 71.2% of Aiken Technical College students, compared with 78.6% of other students in the cohort, responded *at least once* on Item 19g. It is important to note that some colleges' lowest scores might be higher than the cohort mean.

Figure 3

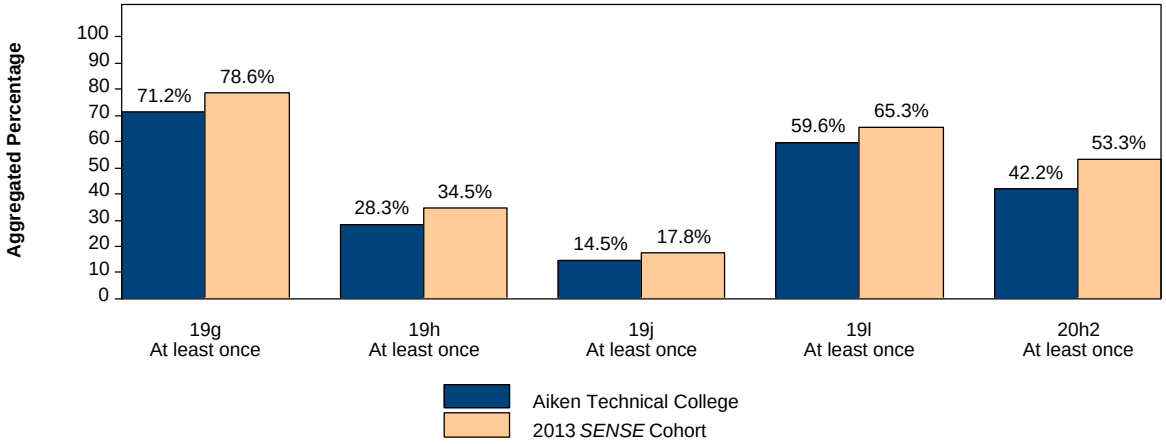


Table 2

Benchmark	Item Number	Item
Engaged Learning	19g	Frequency: Worked with other students on a project or assignment during class
Engaged Learning	19h	Frequency: Worked with classmates outside of class on class projects or assignments
Engaged Learning	19j	Frequency: Participated in a student-initiated study group outside of class
Engaged Learning	19l	Frequency: Used an electronic tool to communicate with an instructor about coursework
Engaged Learning	20h2	Frequency: Used computer lab

Notes:

For Item(s) 19, except 19c, 19d, 19f, and 19s, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

For Item(s) 20, *once*, *two or three times*, and *four or more times* responses are combined.

SENSE Special-Focus Module Items

SENSE special-focus modules allow participating colleges and researchers to delve more deeply into areas of early student experience and institutional practices that are related to student success. The bar charts across pages 6 and 7 display frequency results for five items from the Promising Practices module.

To access compete special-focus module frequency reports, please visit the *SENSE* online reporting system via **www.cccse.org**.

For colleges that did not participate in this special-focus module, respondent data for the Promising Practices for Community College Student Success module are displayed.

Figure 4: At this college, I completed registration before the first class session(s).

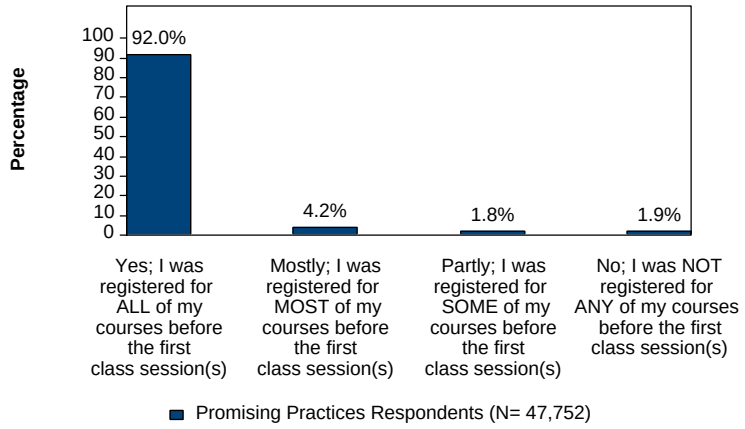


Figure 5: I became aware that I was required to take a placement test (ACCUPLACER, ASSET, COMPASS, etc.) at this college:

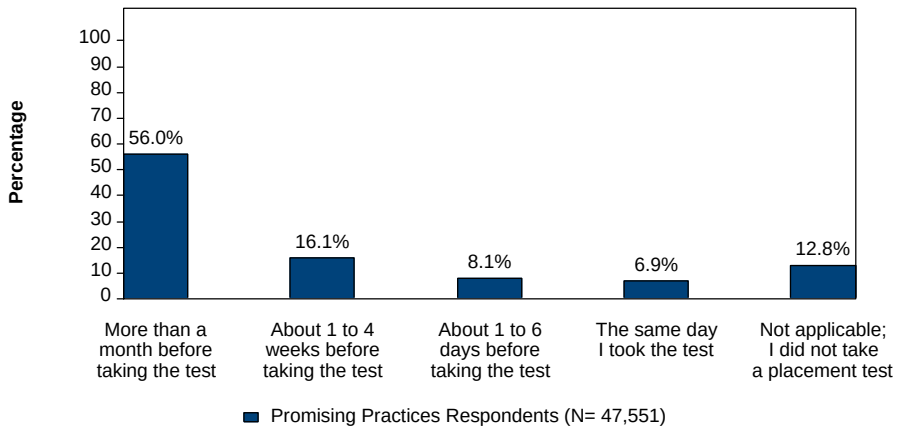


Figure 6: At this college, I am participating in a structured experience for new students (sometimes called a ' freshman seminar ' or ' first-year experience ').

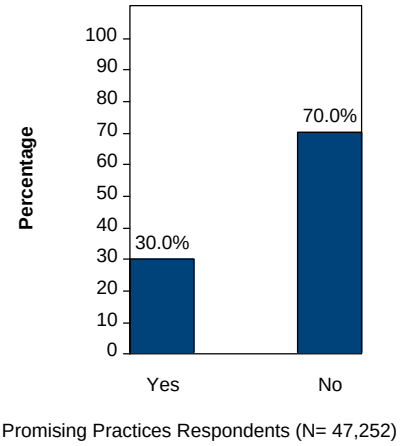


Figure 7: At this college, my instructors clearly explained a class attendance policy that specified how many classes I could miss without penalty.

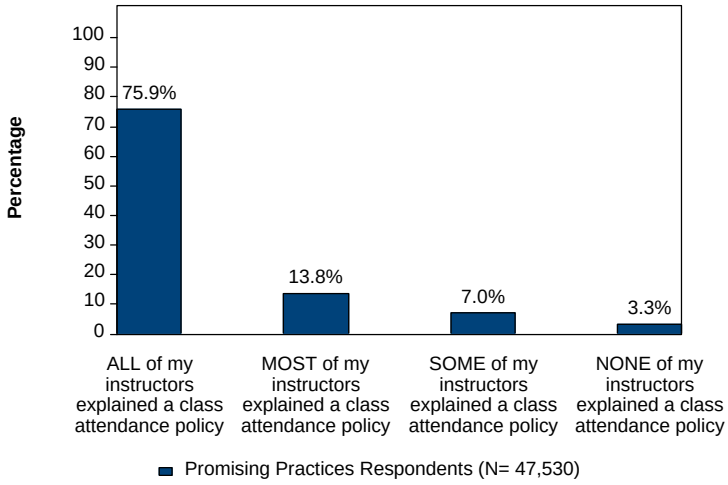
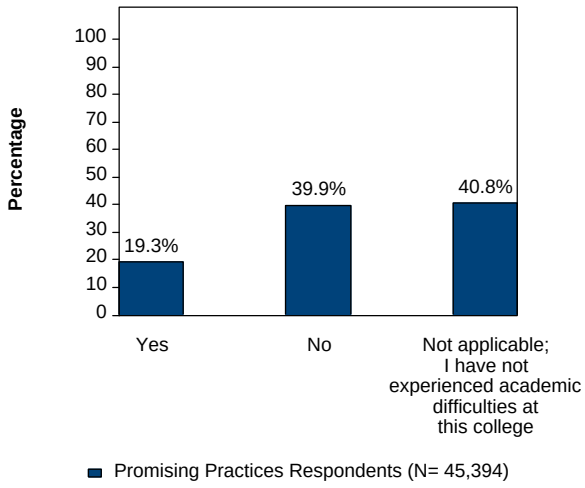


Figure 8: Someone at this college contacts me if I am struggling with my studies to help me get the assistance I need.



Academic Goal Setting and Planning

Most community colleges have academic and goal setting policies that are intended to help all students *start right*. Yet, often these policies, even when they are ostensibly mandatory, might not be implemented in ways that ensure success for all students. The disaggregated data below illustrate the student experience with academic goal setting and planning at your college. Nationally, more than 60% of community college students are enrolled less than full time. Thus, while looking at these data, it is important to consider the institution's enrollment patterns. Are all of your entering students starting right?

Figure 9

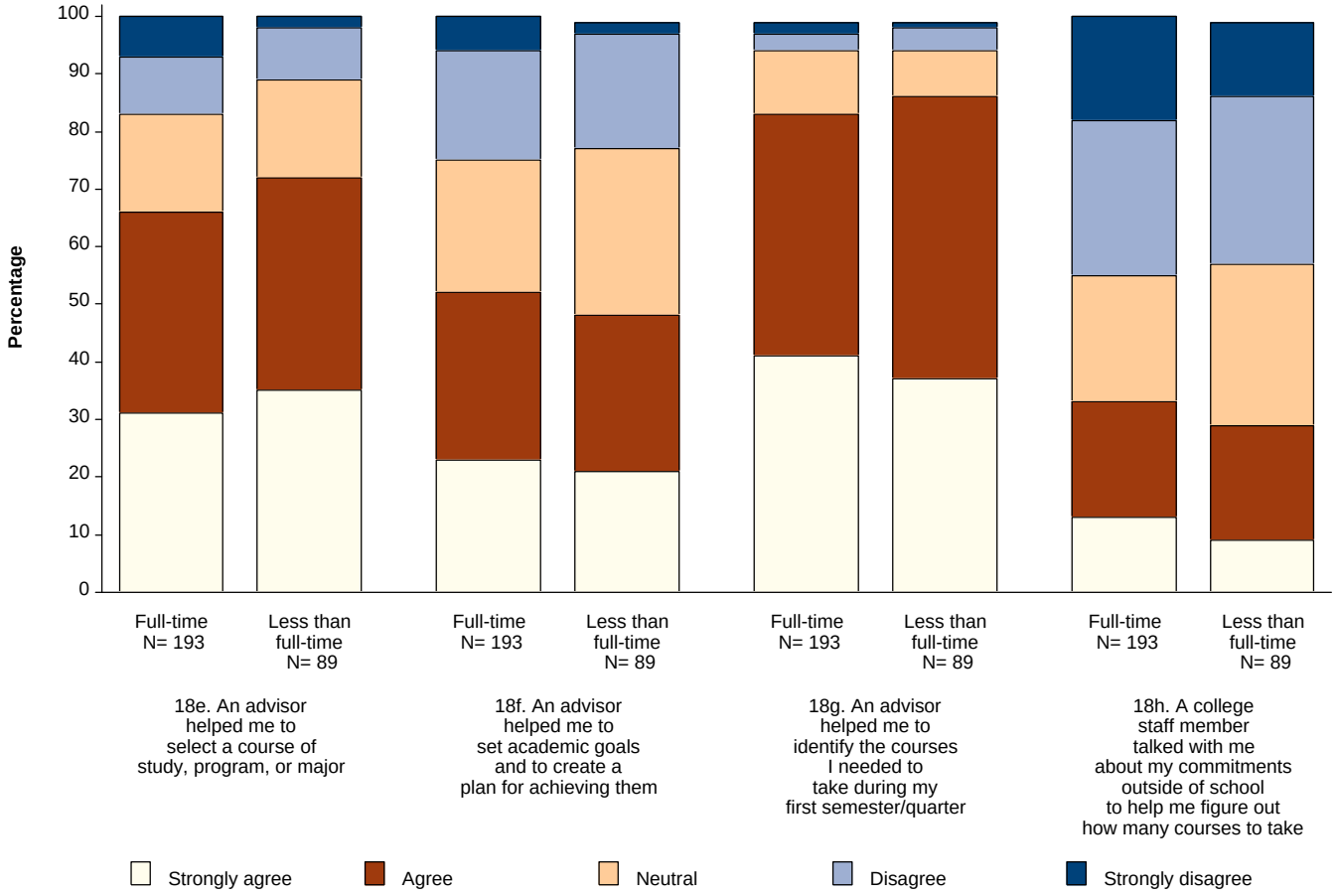


Table 3

	18e		18f		18g		18h	
Response	**Full-time**	**Less than full-time**	**Full-time**	**Less than full-time**	**Full-time**	**Less than full-time**	**Full-time**	**Less than full-time**
Strongly agree	30.6%	34.8%	23.3%	21.3%	41.5%	37.1%	13.0%	9.0%
Agree	34.7%	37.1%	29.0%	27.0%	42.5%	49.4%	20.2%	20.2%
Neutral	17.1%	16.9%	23.3%	29.2%	11.4%	7.9%	21.8%	28.1%
Disagree	9.8%	9.0%	18.7%	20.2%	3.1%	4.5%	27.5%	29.2%
Strongly disagree	7.8%	2.2%	5.7%	2.2%	1.6%	1.1%	17.6%	13.5%