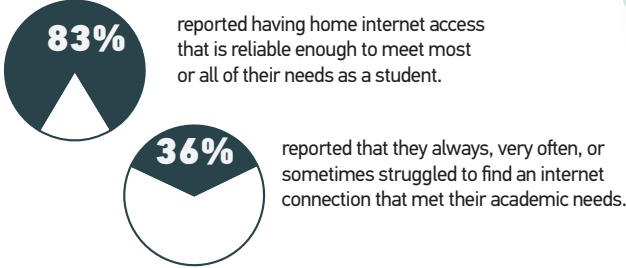# CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
Connectivity and technology in the pandemic:
STUDENTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS

To explore students' challenges with connectivity and technology during the pandemic, we partnered with California State University (CSU) to conduct focus groups with 28 students from four CSU campuses: California State University, Fresno; Humboldt State University; San Diego State University; and California State University, Northridge.

HARDWARE AND SOFTWARE STRUGGLES

Students were challenged with inadequate hardware, operating system compatibility issues, and juggling multiple applications to complete and turn in their work.
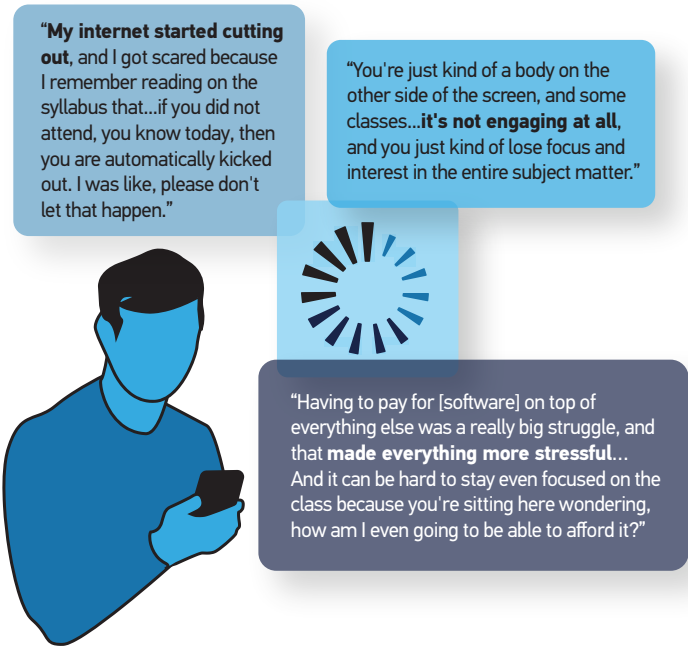
83% reported having home internet access that is reliable enough to meet most or all of their needs as a student.

36% reported that they always, very often, or sometimes struggled to find an internet connection that met their academic needs.

"Sometimes **it could be a real hassle** trying to get a program that mostly works on Windows to run on iOS. It's really frustrating to have to go through the hoops to even just be able to submit an assignment."

"...using like **seven different applications** to turn in homework. So it's like for this class, I have to do Blackboard. This class I have to do Canvas. This class I have to post something on Instagram."

"When I was having an issue with the LockDown Browser I would try three of my roommates' computers...and so we would have to try to figure out a schedule...and **that was really frustrating** trying to go back and forth."

Suggestions from students
• University-provided computers with preloaded software
• Available spaces to study, connect to the internet, and print
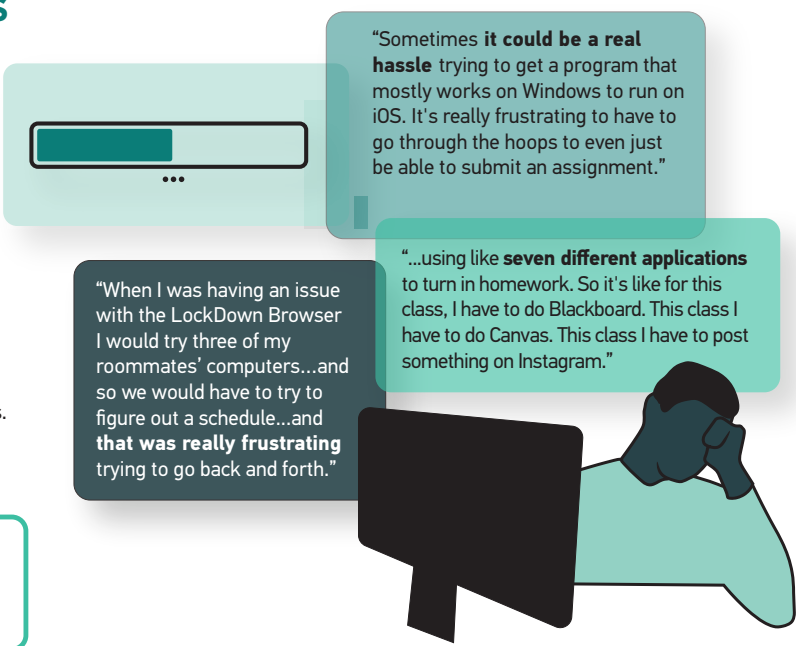
THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY CHALLENGES

In addition to the frustration we all face related to basic internet access and technical troubleshooting in the digital age, focus group participants experienced tech fatigue, oppressive course policies, and financial constraints.

"**My internet started cutting out**, and I got scared because I remember reading on the syllabus that...if you did not attend, you know today, then you are automatically kicked out. I was like, please don't let that happen."

"You're just kind of a body on the other side of the screen, and some classes...**it's not engaging at all**, and you just kind of lose focus and interest in the entire subject matter."

"Having to pay for [software] on top of everything else was a really big struggle, and that **made everything more stressful**... And it can be hard to stay even focused on the class because you're sitting here wondering, how am I even going to be able to afford it?"

Steps CSU leaders took to reduce the impact of the pandemic

1 Distributed more than 21,000 new laptops and 10,000 mobile Wi-Fi hotspots to students (an investment of over $18 million)

2 Provided supplementary equipment such as webcams and headsets

3 Expanded outdoor Wi-Fi in areas such as parking lots

4 Subsidized low-cost internet for students at home

5 Virtualized software

Suggestions from students
• Assistive devices such as blue light filters to reduce screen fatigue
• Flexible assignment design that encourages multimedia assignments
• Financial support and maintenance programs for technology

STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF IT RESOURCES

Students relied on personal solutions for IT troubleshooting because they felt they could handle the issues on their own, they thought the issues would not be under the purview of available services, or they didn't know what IT services could do for them.

How do students usually handle tech problems?

I try to resolve the issue myself.	**72%**
I go to a friend or family member to resolve the issue.	13
I contact IT/tech support at my institution.	9
I contact the manufacturer's tech support.	4

"I also don't really know what IT does for us, so **I don't know if I should really ask them for help** when I have issues or not."

"Majority of my problems are with the [internet] company itself, not with [university] stuff.... **I'd rather just call the [internet] company** and have them deal with it."

"Most of the issues I would face I could just fix by myself...I just knew about it from past experience or **I would just Google it.**"

Suggestions from students
• Send students information via faculty and advisors
• Communicate more frequently, including email, text, and LMS messages

New resources at CSU

Learn more about the new CSUCCESS (California State University Connectivity Contributing to Equity and Student Success) program, one way the CSU is improving tech equity. Fall 2021 kickoff with eight participating campuses.

New first-year and transfer students who register receive an iPad Air, Apple Pencil, and Apple Smart Keyboard Folio. Students will keep iPad bundle for the entirety of their undergraduate experience at the CSU.

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