

Pandemic Impact Report

JULY 2020

u★aspire



Over the last challenging months,

uAspire supported students as they navigated the COVID-19 pandemic and faced violent reminders of the systemic racism that has long hindered the pursuit of education and economic opportunity. To address our students' expanding and evolving needs, we leveraged our expertise, innovation, and partnerships. At the start of a new fiscal year, we reflect on the impact of our multi-faceted approach during these crises. **Our mission is more critical than ever.** We must apply the lessons learned to accelerate our work to increase postsecondary outcomes for students of color, first-generation students, and students from low-income backgrounds.

“I have bills I need to pay and was told I am not able to go to work until this dies down. I had to sell my laptop to pay my car insurance.”

– uAspire Student

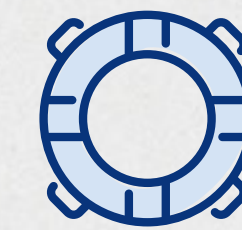
Support Students

As students experienced the economic, mental, and physical effects of dual crises, we prioritized delivering the resources and support students needed most—100% virtually. Advisors helped students with their most urgent problems, pivoting between texting and use of phone or video calls and email.

14,363

High school and college students advised from California, Massachusetts, and New York

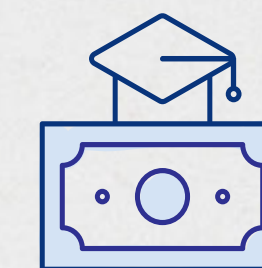
Students' Needs



Economic relief



Technology access



Financial aid applications and appeals



College decisions and plans

76%

first-generation college students

90%

identify as people of color

79%

from low-income backgrounds



Students of color have responded to the disparities and injustices, exacerbated by COVID-19, in their communities. What they have witnessed and endured these past few months has been deeply traumatic. In response, **uAspire advisors offered holistic support**, checking in on their students, making sure they feel heard and cared for, and connecting them with mental health resources.

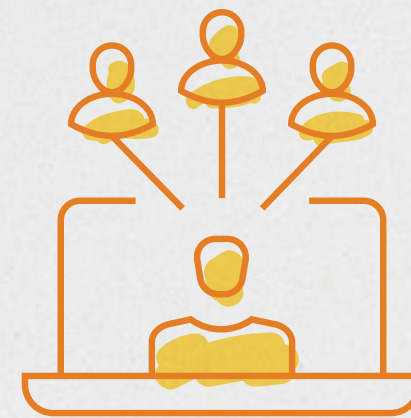


Share & Inform

With constant changes to financial aid processes and college policies, we identified ways to **support and share timely, accurate information** with school counselors and college access providers.

1,800

Reached 1,800 practitioners through our online training and webinars with school districts and community organizations



Hosted free webinars—Summer Transition and How to Support & Engage Students Over Text—for 593 attendees

1,435

COVID-19 Support Resources on uAspire.org had 1,435 unique users

“I have taken out the maximum amount of student loans every quarter and I still end up with very little to no money for basic needs once I have paid for all of my course materials and other student fees.”

- Ruby, uAspire Student Advocacy Fellow

Advance Solutions

Our policy team and Student Advocacy Fellows engaged federal, state, and higher ed leaders advocating for policies to **prioritize students most in need**. Shared actionable, evidence-based recommendations to:

STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL SECURITY / WIDEN ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

SIMPLIFY FINANCIAL AID PROCESSES / ADDRESS BROADBAND GAP



Signatory on 15 joint letters
urging leaders to address students'
needs during and after COVID-19 crisis



uAspire Student Advocacy Fellows held 43 congressional meetings
to share their experiences affording non-tuition costs and ways
to make them more transparent and affordable



Released our research report, **Beyond the College Bill: The Hidden Hurdles of Indirect Expenses**, examining how difficult it is to find, understand, and consistently calculate non-tuition costs, and the impact on students trying to complete their degree. Presented the report's findings and policy recommendations to 180 attendees at a briefing sponsored by The Office of Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07).



“These past couple of days have been difficult but I came to the decision of not going to school this upcoming semester. I want to transfer to a cheaper school like a community college for a semester or two to pull my grades up.

Can you help me through this process?”

- uAspire Student

Looking Ahead

As we tackle the challenges ahead, we must navigate nimbly, deepen connections to our communities, and prioritize our most vulnerable students in this shifting and racially unjust environment.

These key factors will guide our work in fiscal year 2021.



Flexibility

Planning in phases so our advising program and teams can quickly adapt to students' changing needs



Innovation

Creating dynamic ways to connect with students, disseminate information, and engage broader communities



Focus

Looking at who we serve through a racial equity lens and how we support students of color



Voice

Centering the lived experiences of students most impacted to inform our work and push for systemic change



Collaboration

Working closely with partner organizations, school districts, and national experts to identify and address students' greatest needs



Sign up for our emails at uAspire.org and follow us [@uAspire](https://twitter.com/uAspire) for updates on our work.