

RESEARCH BRIEF

**Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) 2021:
Benchmark Scores and Aspects of Student Engagement**

In Fall 2021, Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) administered the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), which is conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE). SENSE 2021 was administered in the fourth and fifth weeks of the fall semester in courses that typically enroll large numbers of first-year students. The survey measures student engagement in areas that are important for students' experiences and educational outcomes. At NOVA, 1,394 students participated in the SENSE survey in Fall 2021.

This research brief presents the following SENSE 2021 survey results:

- NOVA's benchmark scores compared to the top 10 percent of the averaged benchmark scores among CCCSE member institutions in 2019, 2020, and 2021 (referred to as the "three-year cohort") (Section 1 of this report).
- The highest benchmark scores that NOVA received compared to the SENSE 2021 cohort of surveyed institutions (Section 2).
- The lowest benchmark scores that NOVA received compared to the SENSE 2021 cohort (Section 3).

Key Findings

NOVA's Highest Standardized Benchmark Scores (Section 1)

- Academic and Social Support Network (46 score)
- Engaged Learning (45 score)
- Early Connections (39 score)
- High Expectations and Aspirations (39 score)

NOVA's Highest Aspects of Student Engagement (Section 2)

- 74 percent of respondents "worked with other students on a project or assignment during class" at least once
- 73 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that "at least one other student whom I did not previously know learned my name"

- 62 percent of respondents “used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework” at least once

NOVA’s Lowest Aspects of Student Engagement (Section 3)

- 27 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that “an advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them”
- 21 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that “a college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take”
- 15 percent of respondents “used [a] writing, math, or other skill lab” at least once

SENSE 2021 was administered via paper-and-pencil in a representative sample of in-person course sections on NOVA’s comprehensive campuses, including the Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun, Manassas, and Woodbridge campuses. To prepare for the survey administration, NOVA’s Office of Strategic Insights (OSI) created a course schedule file comprising selected sections of the courses shown in Table 1 for inclusion in the sample pursuant to CCCSE guidelines. CCCSE then used this course schedule file to construct the sample file that was used to conduct the survey. One course section at the Medical Education Campus fit the survey criteria and was included in the course schedule file; however, this section was not included in the random sample. SDV 101 met the course selection criteria but not the survey scheduling criteria. The survey was administered by NOVA faculty and staff who volunteered to assist.

Table 1. List of Sampled Courses: SENSE 2021

Course	Course
EDE 10 – English Composition Preparation	MTH 154 – Quantitative Reasoning
ENG 111 – College Composition I	MTH 161 – Pre-Calculus I
ENG 112 – College Composition II	SDV 100 – College Success Skills
MDE 10 – Introduction to Algebra	SDV 101 – Orientation (Degree-specific)*
MDE 60 – Intermediate Algebra	--

*Met course selection criteria but not survey scheduling criteria.

SENSE 2021 was sampled at 200 percent of target to ensure that sufficient responses were received. CCCSE encourages institutions to administer the survey via pencil-and-paper through in-person sections because this method tends to yield a higher response rate than online survey administration. NOVA followed this recommendation and administered SENSE 2021 on paper, through in-person sections only. Among all SENSE cohort institutions in 2019, 2020, and 2021, the survey was administered in-person as follows:

- For the 2019 SENSE, all 30 colleges (100 percent) administered on paper/in-person.
- For the 2020 SENSE, 3 of 13 colleges (23 percent) administered on paper/in-person.
- For the 2021 SENSE, 24 of 40 colleges (60 percent) administered on paper/in-person.

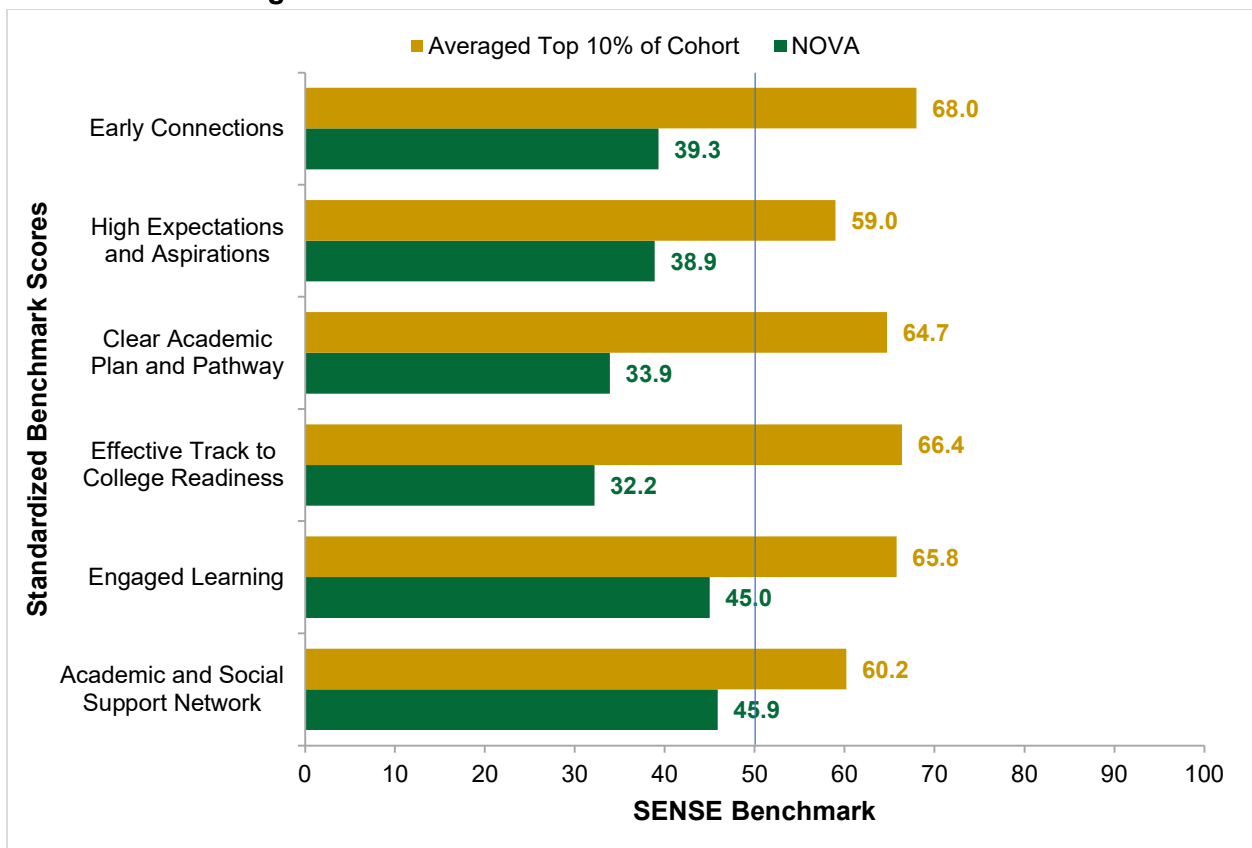
Additionally, CCCSE encourages survey administrators who are not instructional faculty in the subject sections to administer the survey. In most cases at NOVA (86 percent), the SENSE 2021 survey was conducted by volunteers in alignment with this guidance. In some cases (14 percent), circumstances required faculty to administer the survey in sections that they were teaching.

Section 1. Standardized Benchmark Scores

Figure 1 (below) and Table 2 (on the next page) present NOVA’s SENSE 2021 standardized benchmark scores alongside those of the three-year cohort.¹ The standardized benchmark comparison given in the figure indicates that NOVA’s scores were lower than those of the three-year cohort across all benchmarks. Among the benchmarks indicated, NOVA’s scores were highest for the following: Academic and Social Support Network (46 score), Engaged Learning (45 score), Early Connections (39 score), and High Expectations and Aspirations (39 score). NOVA’s scores were lowest for the following benchmarks: Clear Academic Plan and Pathway (34 score) and Effective Track to College Readiness (32 score).

As shown in Table 2 on the next page, NOVA was closest to the three-year cohort average for the following benchmarks: Academic and Social Support Network (14 points below the three-year cohort average), High Expectations and Aspirations (20 points below the three-year cohort average), and Engaged Learning (21 points below the three-year cohort average).

Figure 1. Standardized Benchmark Scores: SENSE 2021



Source: CCCSE

Note: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents.

¹ Among CCCSE member institutions that administered SENSE in multiple years during the three-year cohort, only the most recent scores for that institution are included in the average.

Table 2. Standardized Benchmark Scores: SENSE 2021

Benchmark	NOVA	Cohort	Difference
Early Connections	39.3	68.0	-28.7
High Expectations and Aspirations	38.9	59.0	-20.1
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	33.9	64.7	-30.8
Effective Track to College Readiness	32.2	66.4	-34.2
Engaged Learning	45.0	65.8	-20.8
Academic and Social Support Network	45.9	60.2	-14.3

Source: CCCSE

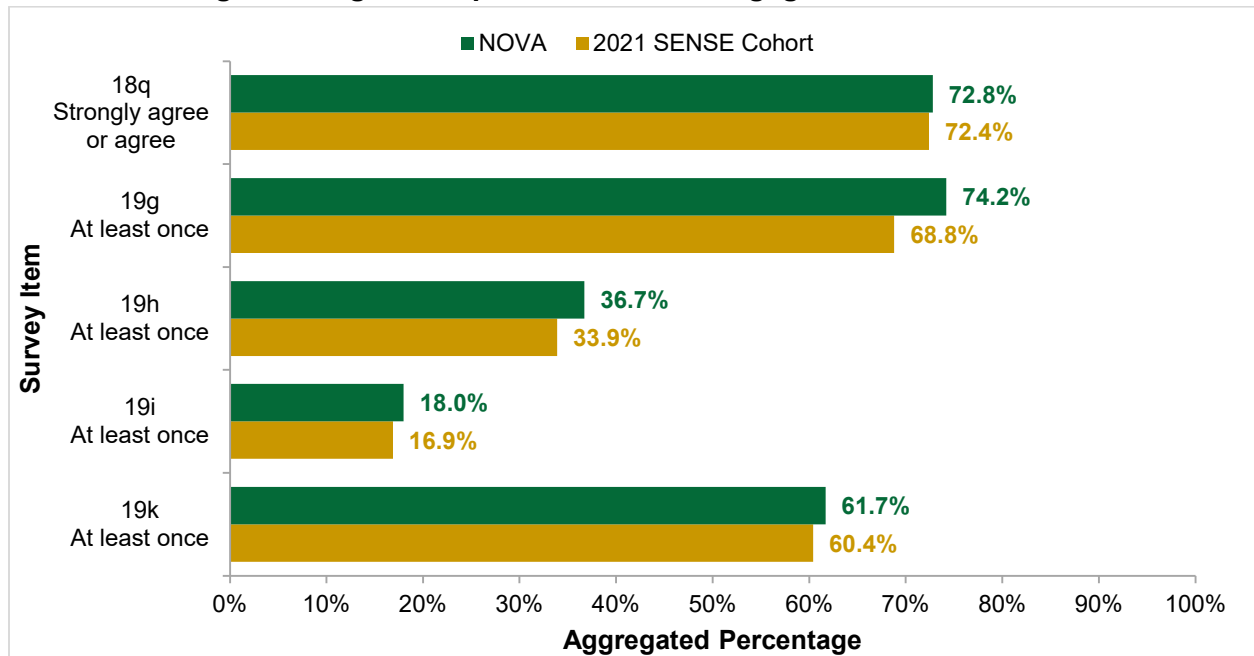
Note: Benchmark scores are standardized to have a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 25 across all respondents.

Section 2. Highest Aspects of Student Engagement

Figure 2 (below) and Table 3 (on the next page) show the highest aspects of student engagement at NOVA compared to the average of the cohort of institutions that administered SENSE in 2021.

Among survey respondents at NOVA, 74 percent indicated that they “worked with other students on a project or assignment during class” at least once (item 19g), 73 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that “at least one other student whom I did not previously know learned my name” (item 18q), and 62 percent “used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework” at least once (item 19k). As shown in Table 4 on the next page, NOVA scored higher than the average of the SENSE 2021 cohort institutions for all of the College’s highest aspects of student engagement.

Figure 2. Highest Aspects of Student Engagement: SENSE 2021



Source: CCCSE

Table 3. Highest Aspects of Student Engagement: SENSE 2021

Item	Description	Benchmark	NOVA (%)	Cohort (%)	Difference
18q	At least one other student whom I did not previously know learned my name	Academic and Social Support Network	72.8	72.4	0.4
19g	Frequency: Worked with other students on a project or assignment during class	Engaged Learning	74.2	68.8	5.4
19h	Frequency: Worked with classmates outside of class on class projects or assignments	Engaged Learning	36.7	33.9	2.8
19i	Frequency: Participated in a required study group outside of class	Engaged Learning	18.0	16.9	1.1
19k	Frequency: Used an electronic tool to communicate with another student about coursework	Engaged Learning	61.7	60.4	1.3

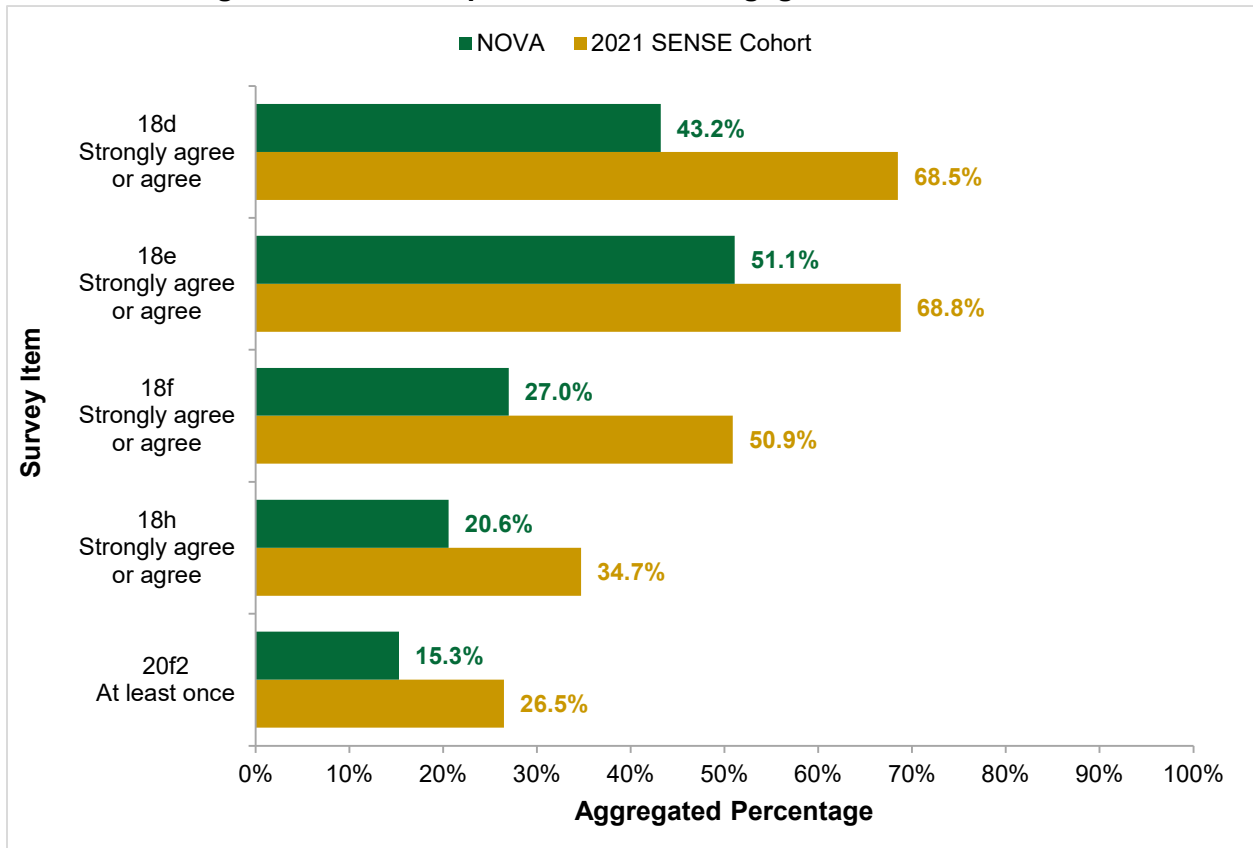
Source: CCCSE

Section 3. Lowest Aspects of Student Engagement

Figure 3 and Table 4 (on the next page) show the lowest aspects of student engagement at NOVA compared to the average of the cohort of institutions that administered SENSE in 2021. Among survey respondents at NOVA, 51 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that “an advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major” (item 18e), 43 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that they were “able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me” (item 18d), and 27 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that “an advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them” (item 18f). However, only 21 percent either strongly agreed or agreed that “a college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take” (item 18h), and 15 percent “used [a] writing, math, or other skill lab” at least once (item 20f2).

As shown in Table 4 on the next page, NOVA was closest to the average of the SENSE 2021 cohort institutions for the following lowest aspects of student engagement: item 20f2 “used [a] writing, math, or other skill lab” at least once (11 percentage points below the 2021 cohort), item 18h “a college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take” (14 percentage points below the 2021 cohort), and item 18e “an advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major” (18 percentage points below the 2021 cohort).

Figure 3. Lowest Aspects of Student Engagement: SENSE 2021



Source: CCCSE

Table 4. Lowest Aspects of Student Engagement: SENSE 2021

Item	Description	Benchmark	NOVA (%)	Cohort (%)	Difference
18d	Able to meet with an academic advisor at times convenient for me	Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	43.2	68.5	-25.3
18e	An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major	Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	51.1	68.8	-17.7
18f	An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them	Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	27.0	50.9	-23.9
18h	A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses to take	Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	20.6	34.7	-14.1
20f2	Frequency: Used [a] writing, math, or other skill lab	Engaged Learning	15.3	26.5	-11.2

Source: CCCSE