



# Housatonic Community College's SENSE Trend Report

2009-2016

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# What is SENSE?

Community Colleges today are facing unprecedented challenges. Presently, students are increasingly arriving to college underprepared with no financial support. Nationally, nearly 50% of entering students drop out before their second year, while those that stay in school, often struggle to complete developmental sequences.

SENSE, or the Survey of Entering Student Engagement, focuses on the community college student's "front door" experience. The SENSE survey collects and analyzes data about institutional practices and student behaviors in the first 4-5 weeks of college. This data helps the institution improve their practices that may affect student success in their first year.

# Measures of SENSE

**Benchmark Areas:** The SENSE Benchmark Areas denotes areas that educational research has shown to be important to entering students' college experience and educational outcomes. Every participating SENSE institution receives a standardized score for each benchmark. Those scores make it possible for the institution to compare their benchmark performance with other participating colleges.

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

# Measures of SENSE cont.

**Higher Expectations and Aspirations:** Nearly all students arrive at their community college 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:** 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.

# Measures of SENSE cont.

**Effective Track to College Readiness:** Nationally, more than six in 10 entering community college students are underprepared for college-level work. 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.

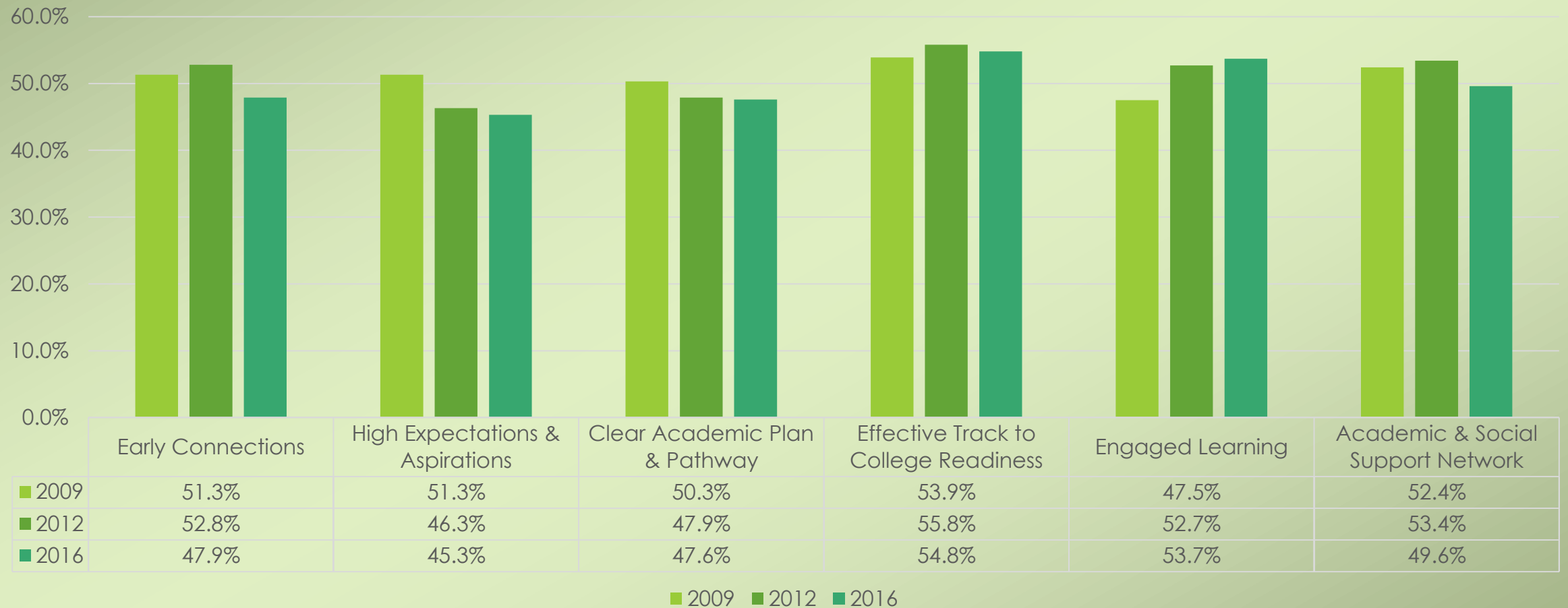
**Engaged Learning:** Instructional approaches that foster engaged learning are critical for student success. Most community college students attend part-time, and also must find ways to balance their studies with their personal lives and responsibilities. Because of this, the most effective learning experience 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. Colleges must purposefully create those networks to provide students with what that they're not aware of.

# SENSE Student Engagement Benchmarks

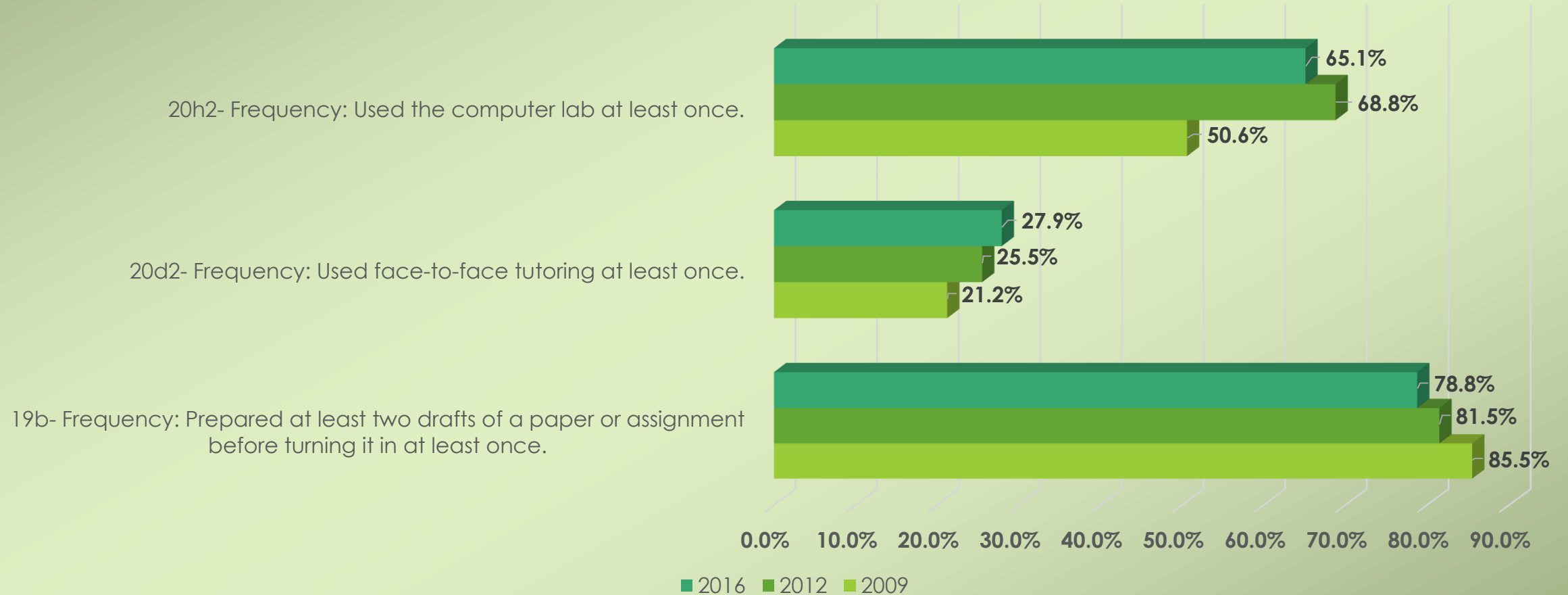
Benchmark Area	2009	2012	2016
Early Connections	51.3%	52.8%	47.9%
High Expectations & Aspirations	51.3%	46.3%	45.3%
Clear Academic Plan & Pathway	50.3%	47.9%	47.6%
Effective Track to College Readiness	53.9%	55.8%	54.8%
Engaged Learning	47.5%	52.7%	53.7%
Academic & Social Support Network	52.4%	53.4%	49.6%

# SENSE Student Engagement Benchmarks



# Aspects of Highest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding SENSE data. One way to dig deeper into these scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features four items on which Housatonic Community College performed most favorably relative to the rest of the 2009, 2012 and 2016 cohort.

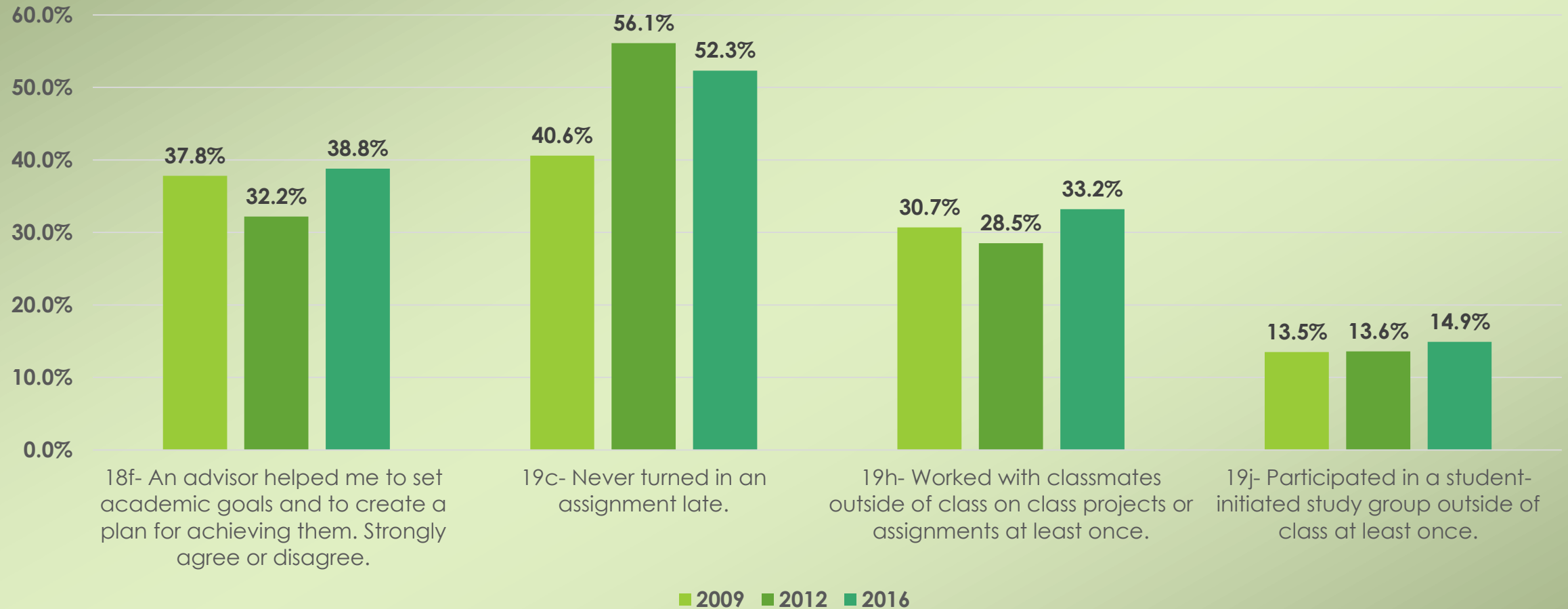


*For item 19b, once, two or three times, and four or more times responses are combined.  
For item(s) 20, once, two or three times and four or more times responses are combined.*



# Aspects of Lowest Student Engagement

Benchmark scores provide a manageable starting point for reviewing and understanding SENSE data. One way to dig deeper into these scores is to analyze those items that contribute to the overall benchmark score. This section features four items on which Housatonic Community College performed least favorably relative to the rest of the 2009, 2012 and 2016 cohort.



*For item 18, strongly agree and agree responses are combined.*

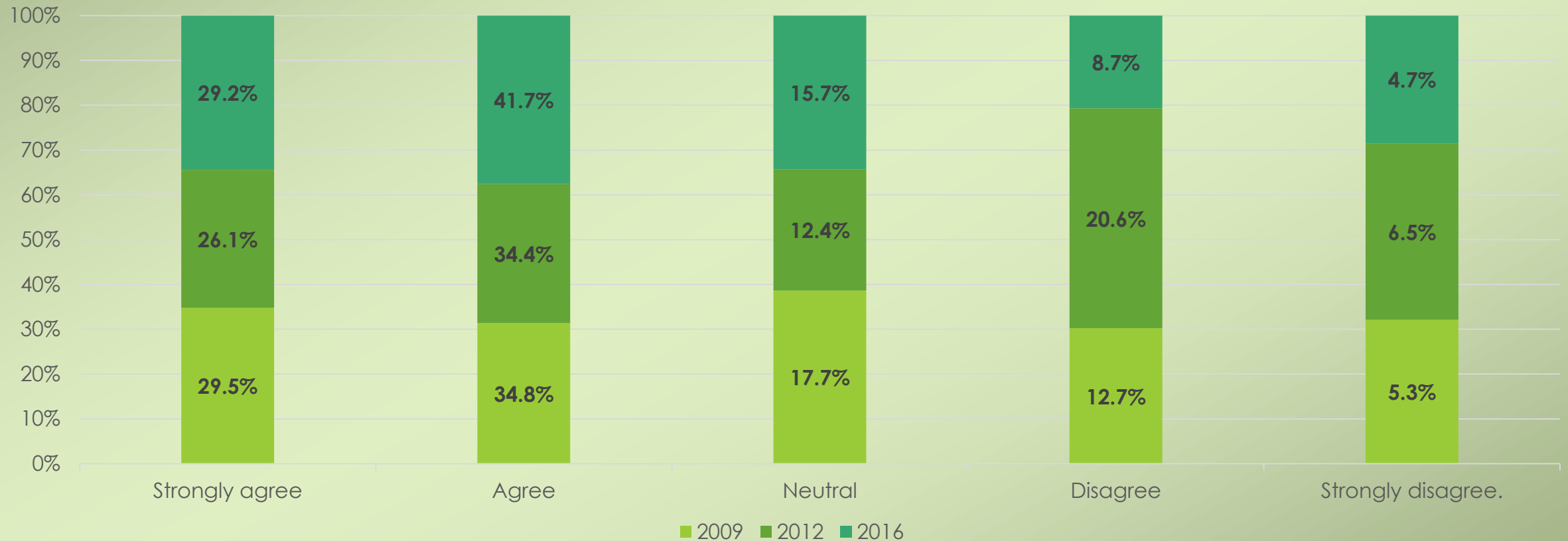
*For items 19h and 19j, once, two or three times, and four or more times responses are combined.*

*For item 19c, responses have been reversed. The frequency displayed is the percentage of students who report never doing the activities described in the items.*

# Academic Goal Setting and Planning

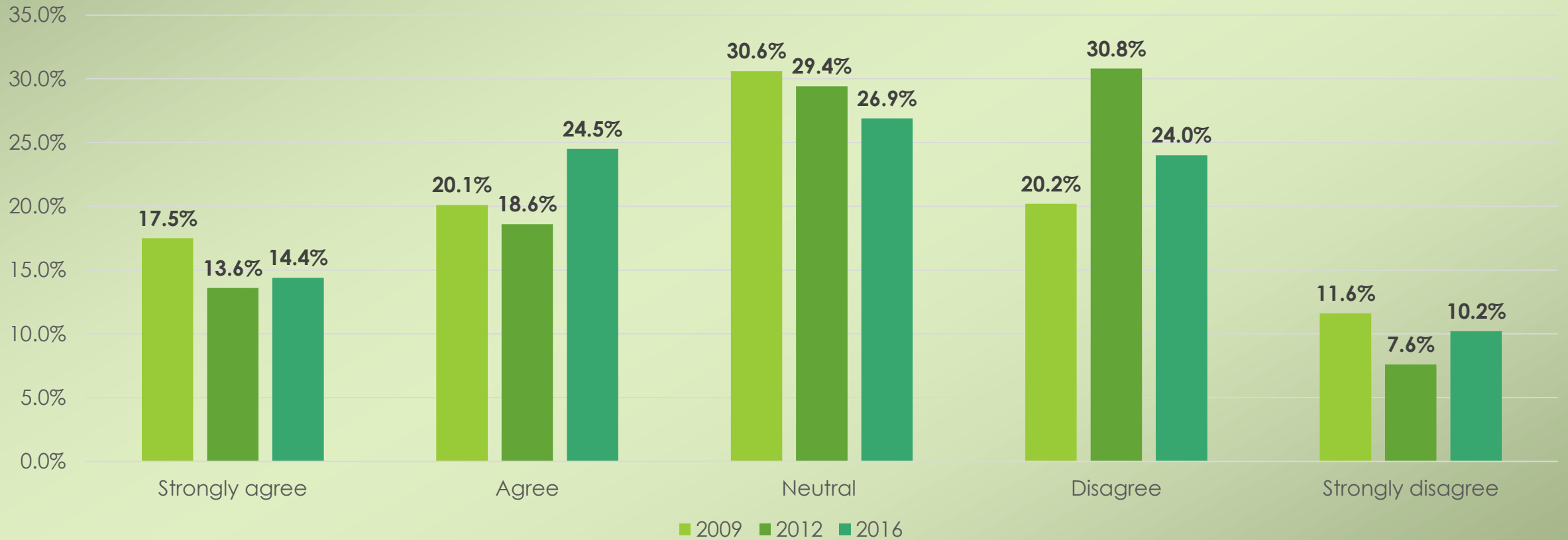
Most community colleges have academic and goal setting policies that are intended to help all students “start right”. Yet, often these policies, even when they are ostensibly mandatory, might not be implemented in ways that ensure success for all students. The data below illustrates the student experience with academic goal setting and planning at Housatonic Community College from 2009, 2012 and 2016.

18e- An advisor helped me to select a course of study, program, or major.



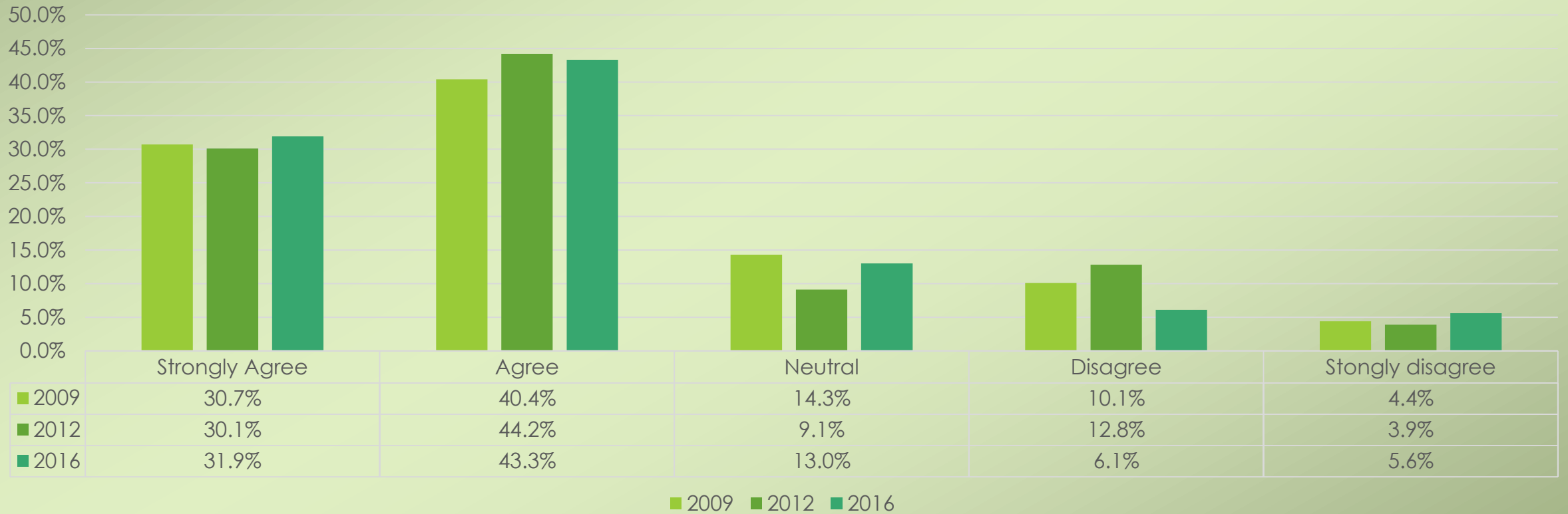
# Academic Goal Setting and Planning

18f- An advisor helped me to set academic goals and to create a plan for achieving them.



# Academic Goal Setting and Planning

18g- An advisor helped me to identify the courses I needed to take during my first semester.  
Full-time students



# Academic Goal Setting and Planning

18h- A college staff member talked with me about my commitments outside of school to help me figure out how many courses I should take.

Full-time students



# SENSE Results

While looking at this data, it is important to consider Housatonic Community College's enrollment patterns. As an institution, we must ask ourselves "Are our students starting out right?"

It is important to use this data to help know what may or may not work in helping retain and support our entering students. We must review our results and use it to help our institution understand our students' critical early experiences and learn if we may need to improve institutional practices that affect student success in their first year.