

STUDENT PARENTS AT FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAMS, PRACTICE AND POLICY



“A college degree is truly going to make the difference between my family becoming self-sufficient and successful or just barely getting by in a lifelong financial struggle that could eventually extend into many generations to come.”

Student parent

Over one million student parents at four-year colleges and universities are a largely invisible population, to their institutions as well as to researchers and policymakers.¹ Those in traditional four-year programs are overwhelmingly low-income young mothers with young children. They are highly motivated, which they have to be to overcome the myriad challenges they face as parents, students, and workers. A bachelor's degree means a chance at a family-sustaining income, giving both them and their children a more secure pathway out of poverty than most two-year degrees or certificate programs. It means better outcomes for both generations in terms of education, economic security, and health and well-being. However, as of 2009, only 17.4% of students with children who pursued a four-year degree from public and private not-for-profit schools graduated within six years (according to the Institute

for the Women's Policy Research).³ Supportive, targeted government and institutional policies and practices can make a critical difference in the ability of student parents to persist and graduate from four-year colleges and universities.

Institutions of higher education, governments, and society at large all have a lot to gain from increased retention of student parents. Hence, it is in their interests to make changes and devote resources to improving the experiences of student parents and increasing their chances of graduation. Actions suggested at the institutional level largely leverage existing resources, policies, and practices. Many of the institutional constraints that impact higher education institutions and the student parents they serve are the result of policies and priorities at the state and federal level.

1. Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2016a. IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2011-12 *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study and the Integrated Postsecondary Aid Survey* (IPEDS).
2. Gault, B., Reichlin, L., and Roman, S. (2014). *College Affordability for Low-Income Adults: Improving Returns on Investment for Families and Society*. Report C412. Washington DC: Institute for Women's Policy Research.
3. Institute for Women's Policy Research. (2016b). IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2003-04 *Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up* (BPS:04/09).



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For more information, go to: www.endicott.edu/PERG
www.endicott.edu/studentparentprograms

PROGRAM DESIGN AND PRACTICE

For colleges and universities

- Convene a campus-wide task force to assess existing resources and to plan for strengthening support for student parents and their children, using the *Framework of Recommended Practices and the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit* as guides. (A Toolkit to support this process will be available in spring 2017.)
- Become familiar with the recommended strategies outlined by the 2013 US Department of Education Office of Civil Rights pamphlet, *Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students*. (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/pregnancy.pdf>)
- Create student parent programs similar to those for veterans, minority students and other at-risk populations.

For state and federal agencies

- Encourage colleges and universities to create student parent programs, and implement the recommended strategies and programs for pregnant and parenting students in the 2013 US Department of Education pamphlet (*see above*).
- Add student parents to the list of high-risk students eligible for TRIO program funding.
- Explore ways to collaborate across programs and agencies to support student parents and their children.
- Expand funding and incentives to colleges and universities offering campus-based child care serving student families.
- Continue ongoing support for research and program evaluation to inform best practices for student parent success.

DATA TRACKING AND REPORTING

For colleges and universities

- Give students opportunities to disclose parental status after acceptance.
- Collect, track, compare, and report on the demographics and academic progress of all student parents, including transfer students and those who stop out and return.
- Collect relevant information about student parents and their children after graduation as part of other alumni tracking efforts.

For state and federal agencies

- Prioritize student parents as an at-risk population and require institutions to track and report on them, including transfer students and those who stop out and return.
- Clarify or modify rules regarding intra-institutional access to the names of students who claim dependents on their FAFSA applications so that student

"I am a first generation college student and it was very important for me to finish school after getting pregnant my senior year of college. I had to stay an extra year to complete my degree but with the support of my student parent center... I had the necessary tools and information I needed."

Student parent



parents can be identified.

SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENT PARENTS

For colleges and universities

- Every college and university needs a student parent center, or as a start, a trained staff member with designated responsibility and resources, following the models presented in the full report *Baccalaureate Student Parent Programs and the Students They Serve*.
- Administrators should review the 2013 pamphlet, *Supporting the Academic Success of Pregnant and Parenting Students* (see above).
- Enact institutional policies providing fair access including: early course registration and other accommodations often available to other groups; institutional policies for staff and faculty parents should apply to student parents; ensure a clear process for requesting additional accommodations.
- Fully investigate on-campus child care options, and ensure that any on-campus child care is made available and affordable for student parents.

For state and federal agencies

- The Office of Civil Rights should promote and expand the 2013 “Dear Colleague” letter, extending Title IX to include additional protections for parenting students with young children.

“I wish there was an on-campus child care facility so that I could take my child to school with me and check in on him during the day. It would make scheduling much easier. I also wish there was an opportunity to have special child care for studying hours.”

Student parent

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TWO GENERATIONS

For colleges and universities

- Set up a special work-study program for student parents so that they can have relevant, well-supervised on-campus jobs.
- Make sure that student parents have access to information about and support for accessing all possible scholarships and subsidies for which they qualify.
- Seek ways to provide additional financial support for students with children.



For state and federal agencies

- Develop federal or state “student parent grant” programs to help fund additional expenses related to dependent children.
- Postsecondary programs should be included among new two-generation initiatives proposed by President Obama. TANF block-grant funding should be aligned with public benefits agencies and community partnerships serving low-income student families; these services should be available on campuses.
- Ensure full child care funding for all income-qualifying students to cover all class and study time and realistic allowances for commuting; provide encouragement and funding for quality on-campus child care options for student parents.
- Review all Pell grant and other scholarship funding for requirements that adversely impact pregnant and parenting students; enable students who are parents of young children to carry a lower course load without negative student aid consequences.
- Inform students and financial aid offices of the cost of living (COA) adjustment that is allowed for students with dependent children under federal guidelines.
- Increase the loan cap for students with children so that they do not run out of funds before they complete their degrees.

“School budgets and financial aid were based on a single student, with no consideration or individual budget plan for student parents.”

Student parent

