Over one million parenting students are enrolled in baccalaureate degree programs nationwide.1 Some of their colleges and universities provide student parent programs that offer critical resources to help parenting students with the substantial challenges they encounter while working towards a bachelor’s degree.

The information in this fact sheet comes from eight public and private colleges and universities across the country with well-established student parent programs that were part of a study, *Baccalaureate Student Parent Programs and the Students They Serve*.

**PROGRAM FEATURES**

Student parent programs are committed to removing barriers to student success, so that parents can stay in school through graduation. This means providing supports not only for the parents themselves, but also for their families.

**THESE PROGRAMS:**

- Advocate for and empower students, and are often staffed by social workers
- Help students navigate bureaucracies, at their own institutions and elsewhere
- Provide help with the most critical needs of student parents in order to increase the chances of retention and graduation, directly or through referrals for: child care access and subsidies, public assistance, food security, affordable housing access and subsidies; some also help with employment, transportation, and healthcare
- Offer informal and formal counseling, with staff and peer counselors
- Offer physical spaces that provide a critical locus of community, where student parents can break their isolation on campus, build relationships, share tips, etc.
- Provide advocacy on campus to help resolve a variety of academic and other issues, including educating and negotiating directly with faculty and staff or securing the help of others to obtain needed accommodations
- Address some needs of the “second generation,” expose them to college life by sponsoring activities on campus for children with their parents, and often help to ensure quality child care placements
- Write grants and make other efforts to secure extra funding for student parents
- Coordinate with other offices on campus, and form partnerships with organizations off campus
- Build a supportive culture for student parents on campus; the existence of these programs counteracts the invisibility of parenting students and their families

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COMMON PROGRAM ISSUES

• **Need for champion and administrative support**
  Program success can hinge on the support of a high-level administrator who can champion the program and provide critical advocacy for its importance at the institution, although some programs have succeeded without such a champion. Supportive administrators at many levels and in many departments can make a big difference in the effectiveness of parenting programs.

• **Program funding**
  Programs at small private schools are mostly funded by private individual and foundation grants or endowments; those at large state universities often receive significant funding from student fees. Tight resources are a common challenge for parenting programs, and adequate funding often requires a high-level champion, extensive advocacy with good documentation of outcomes, or both.

• **Access to institutional data**
  Data about the number, demographics, and academic progress of all student parents is extremely difficult to get at almost every institution. This has many implications, especially the inability to assess retention and graduation rates.

• **Serving younger, needier students**
  Wraparound programs are especially designed to provide extensive monitoring and support for younger, more vulnerable student parents with high levels of need. Young, new parents living on their own for the first time at institutions with open programs are also in need of intensive help to navigate myriad new life challenges if they are to complete their bachelor's degree.

• **Housing issues**
  Housing choices for parents can have major implications for their lives as students. On-campus housing provides many important benefits, but often requires taking on more debt. While every institution in this study has some family housing, it might be designed primarily for graduate students.

• **Institutional policies**
  Almost none of the institutions in this study, even those with highly successful parenting programs, have any institutional policies targeted especially to issues faced by student parents. Programs and schools have relied on negotiating individual accommodations as necessary. (Title IX protections only explicitly cover pregnant and post-partum women, and not all personnel fully understand those requirements.)

• **Addressing the needs of the second generation**
  Program directors are very aware of the potential of their programs to impact the children of the student parents they serve, both directly and indirectly. When children attend child care on campus, or when families are part of small, residential wraparound programs, it can be easier to monitor what is happening with this second generation.

• **Other issues**
  Other factors faced by most programs include:
  - Taking into account particular contextual and historical factors
  - Maximizing their approach to meeting basic needs
  - Ensuring opportunities for community building among student parents

  “Traditional age students need help figuring out college life, how to balance things, make good choices about what they are doing with their time…They have all those needs of traditional age students, and then they have children. You have to look at both of those sets of needs.”
  
  *Student Parent Program Director*


## Types of Programs

### Open Programs

Open programs have many levels and types of programming and support available to students on a walk-in basis, but students must repeatedly initiate contact with the program to receive on-going services. Those who are motivated and have a high need of assistance can often get extensive individualized help and support from open programs. Other student parents check in or get involved less often, when they need help with a particular issue.

Open programs are an important resource for all student parents living on and off campus in a college community. They generally serve a large number of student parents, including some that receive intensive supports, while having no requirements for participation.

### Wraparound Programs

Wraparound programs require an application and commitment from student parents in exchange for a high level of personalized tracking and extra financial support. Participants must often fit into certain age, gender, marital status, and/or family size constraints. These programs have very limited enrollment, and often but not always are residential and target young single parents.

Wraparound programs are especially suited for single or particularly vulnerable young parents. They can provide the support needed for new parents who are first-time students living on their own for the first time. However, this support requires high levels of resources for small numbers of students.

“Looking for colleges in my senior year of high school was discouraging. I knew that it would be hard to find a fit not only for me but also for my son. Finding this college was like a dream come true. From living on campus to being able to not worry about child care, this college experience helped me to be able to believe that my child and I have a bright future.”

*Student parent*
According to a comparison of survey responses from 224 student parents, those in the highly-resourced (usually residential) wraparound programs, who are usually younger and more vulnerable, experience stronger outcomes in many areas.

**Wraparound Program Students:**

- Report less stress, including related to having enough time with their children
- Receive more emotional support from a variety of sources
- Experience greater stability in relation to food access, child care arrangements, employment, housing
- Take fewer breaks; are less likely to transfer
- Are more involved in school life
- Are more connected to other student parents
- Are more satisfied with services for student parents
- Receive more help with parenting issues
- Have children who experience greater benefits
- More children (all) express a greater desire to attend college
- Children are more likely to be more interested in school, and to be doing better academically

“I feel strongly that the college environment and getting to know other students their age is huge… getting involved in activities that they wouldn’t have encountered. It broadens their social circle, and educates other students.”

*Student Parent Program Director*

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