



RESEARCH REPORT

Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students

Putting Student-Parent Families at the Center of Recommendations for
Practice, Policy, Research, and Investment (Version 1.0)

Theresa Anderson
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Autumn R. Green



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This project was undertaken as a partnership between the Urban Institute and Wellesley Centers for Women. We would like to thank the following individuals who were not formally on the Leadership Council for contributing their insights to this work: Lexi Barrett, Susana Contreras-Mendez, Erica Hernandez, Syeedah White, Derek DeLille, Gayla Sherman, and Lodriguez Murray. We would also like to recognize research and policy analysis assistance by Sarah Galison, Mary Frederick, and Kristi Johns from Wellesley Centers for Women and Julia Payne, Ayesha Islam, and Jincy Wilson from the Urban Institute. We are also grateful for communications project management support from Samantha Cade-Mnisi, graphic design by John Wehmann, and editing by Wesley Jenkins and Alex Dallman of the Urban Institute.

Executive Summary

For postsecondary students with children, pursuing their education goals often requires navigating many different policy systems and supports. In fact, more than 5.4 million college students in the United States have children, representing nearly a quarter of undergraduate students and nearly a third of graduate students. These student parents must concurrently navigate up to 11 large policy systems, which we summarize in our *Student-Parent Families at the Center Framework*, whereas students who are not parenting and otherwise fit a “traditional” college profile primarily interact with one policy system, which we have termed “college access and success policies.”

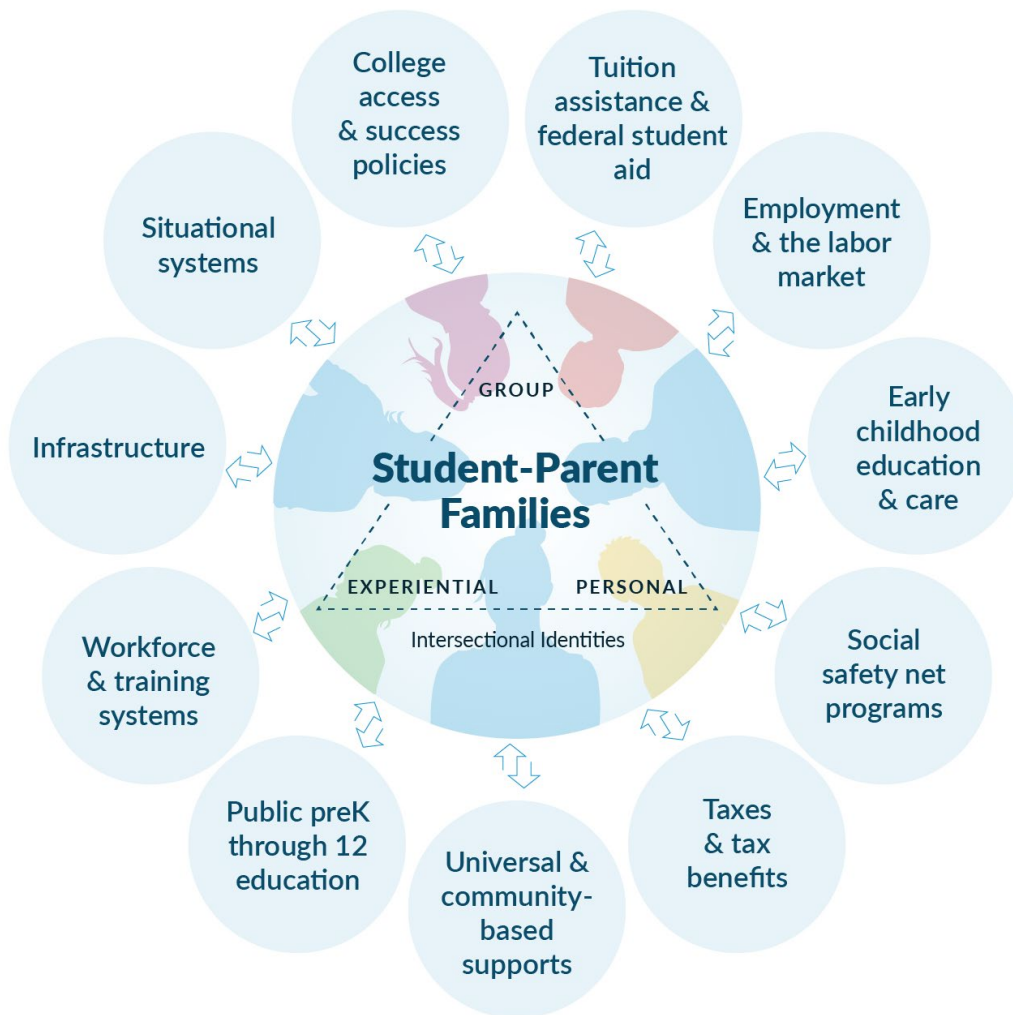
Each of these large system areas contain numerous programs, many of which we have described in detail in a fact sheet series on the [Student-Parent Families at the Center webpage](#). And few, if any, of these systems or programs are designed with parenting students in mind. The complexity of the framework emphasizes the importance of coordinating and cohering practice and policy, which allows student parents the bandwidth and support to achieve their education and life goals.

Currently, national data show that parenting students complete college at a much lower rate than other students, even though they earn comparable course grades.¹ Supporting parents through all stages of their postsecondary education—gaining admission, succeeding in coursework, and ultimately completing their degree or credential goals—would not only yield benefits to the students, but also to their children, to colleges seeking to meet institutional goals, and to the local, state, and national economy. Practice and policy changes to support student parents would also benefit other new majority postsecondary students, even if they do not have children.

In collaboration with a cross-sectoral Leadership Council, we developed a roadmap of opportunities to improve practice, policy, research, and investment to support pregnant and parenting students and their families. We believe this expansive roadmap can provide a vision for stakeholders interested in supporting adults pursuing postsecondary pathways and their families.

FIGURE ES-1

Student-Parent Families at the Center Systems Framework



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The *Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students* is organized into eight overarching goals, which we call “destinations,” as follows:

1. Stakeholders are aware of student-parent families and the conditions they face.
2. Student-parent families experience less time poverty and have sufficient support as they pursue education.
3. Postsecondary education is financially feasible for parents.
4. Families’ basic needs are met during and after education programs.
5. Student parents enter and complete education programs and attain good, fulfilling jobs.

6. Parenting students' children are supported.
7. Colleges meet their goals by supporting student parents.
8. Research and advocacy around student-parent services, policies, and investments are sufficient and effective.

Each destination can be reached through a series of mile markers, under which we identify suggested approaches and examples to guide progress. Stakeholders can also create their own roadmap from the suggestions in this document. A [separate appendix](#) provides two worksheets that can be used to identify promising opportunities that merit further exploration. Many suggestions will require additional implementation steps, though some could be adopted relatively quickly with the right support.

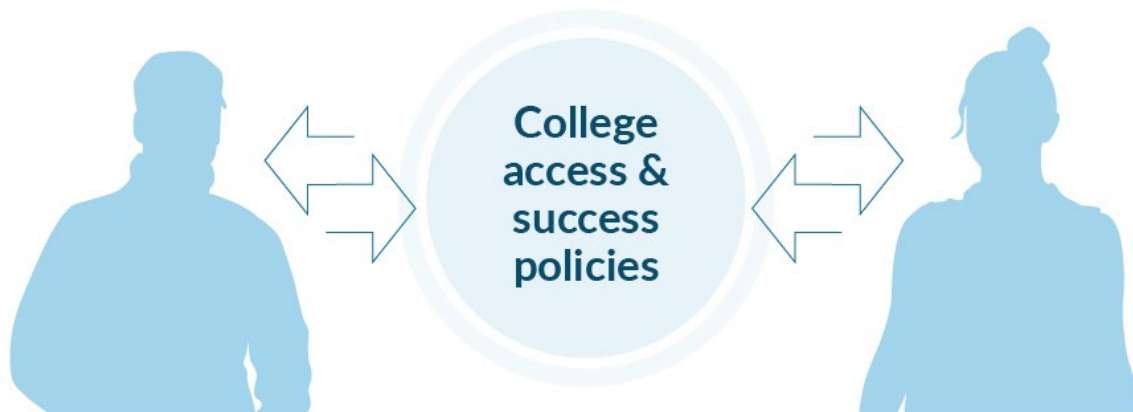
This roadmap is a starting point for practitioners, policymakers, system leaders, and investors to pursue a common agenda and coordinate collaborative efforts. The goals of this work and the strategies to achieve these goals could and should evolve over time. As part of this continuing work, we propose research and action toward these destinations through a new Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative and a National Skills and Training through Action Research (N. STAR) Leadership Network for pregnant and parenting student fellows.

Introduction

The “traditional college student” has been understood as someone in early adulthood whose family supported the cost of attendance, whose primary responsibility was their education, and who was usually white and male.² If we consider social policy systems that affect the daily life of a traditional college student, we can categorize most of them as “college access and success policies” (figure 1). These would include practices and policies like recruitment and outreach; orientation and registration; class scheduling; academic, basic needs, and legal supports; health and mental health services offered by colleges; on-campus dining and college-provided food supports; higher education legislation; and higher education funding.

FIGURE 1

The “Traditional College Student” Primarily Interacts with One Policy System



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The share of students who fit the “traditional” profile has fallen since 1970. Today, only about one out of three students is full time and between the ages of 18 and 21 (relative to about half in 1970),³ and more than four in five full-time students are awarded financial aid.⁴ In addition, only about two in five students identify as male and barely half identify as white.⁵

In addition, student parents make up nearly a quarter of undergraduate students and nearly a third of graduate students.⁶ That amounts to more than 5.4 million learners within at least 5 million US families raising nearly 10 million dependent children. Overall, almost a third of children see their mother in school at some point before they turn 18 (Anderson 2022). But national data show that parenting

students complete college at a much lower rate than other students, even though they earn comparable course grades.⁷

One known source of difficulty for pregnant and parenting students is that they are often heads of low-income families, minorities, and women, and many are single mother students of color (Reichlin Cruse, Holtzman, and Gault 2019), meaning they are disadvantaged in achieving their education goals because of structural racism, sexism, and exclusion related to their intersectional race, gender, and parenting status (Lewis and Haynes 2020). They may also be first-generation students, immigrants, or veterans (Nelson, Froehner, and Gault 2013). Completing a degree substantially improves well-being for student-mothers and their children in the long term (Anderson 2022). But getting through school is challenging for student parents—they often take significantly longer to graduate, and many do not finish. Although the reasons behind this are intersectional and complex, financial challenges make up a major barrier, including inadequate resources to fulfill their families’ basic needs. About 53 percent of student parents struggled with food insecurity, 68 percent experienced housing insecurity, and 17 percent were homeless in the year before the Hope Center’s 2019 #RealCollege survey (Goldrick-Rab, Welton, and Coca 2020).

Supporting parenting students requires more resources because they have families, but decisionmakers’ internalized beliefs about low-income mothers of color may bias support against them. A growing focus on two-generation interventions, access to and success in higher education by diverse student populations, and, more recently, the effects on families and higher education of the COVID-19 pandemic have heightened public awareness of pregnant and parenting students.⁸ In addition, falling college enrollments may compel colleges to consider reaching new student populations, such as students with children, and focusing on retention for those already in their student body (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center 2022).

The single policy system for “traditional” college students represented in figure 1 contrasts sharply with the many policy systems that student-parent families interact with on a regular basis. We have framed **student-parent families at the center** of a ring of policy systems in figure 2 to visualize the complexities they navigate. We have used this picture to organize a cross-sector framework that comprehensively maps the intersecting policy systems affecting student-parent families and the programs and issues within each. Systems include college access and success policies, tuition assistance and financial aid, employment and the labor market, early childhood education and care, social safety net programs, tax benefits, universal and community-based supports, public preK–12 education, workforce and training systems, infrastructure, and what we have termed “situational systems” (fact sheets for each of these topics can be found on the [Student-Parent Families at the Center website](#)).

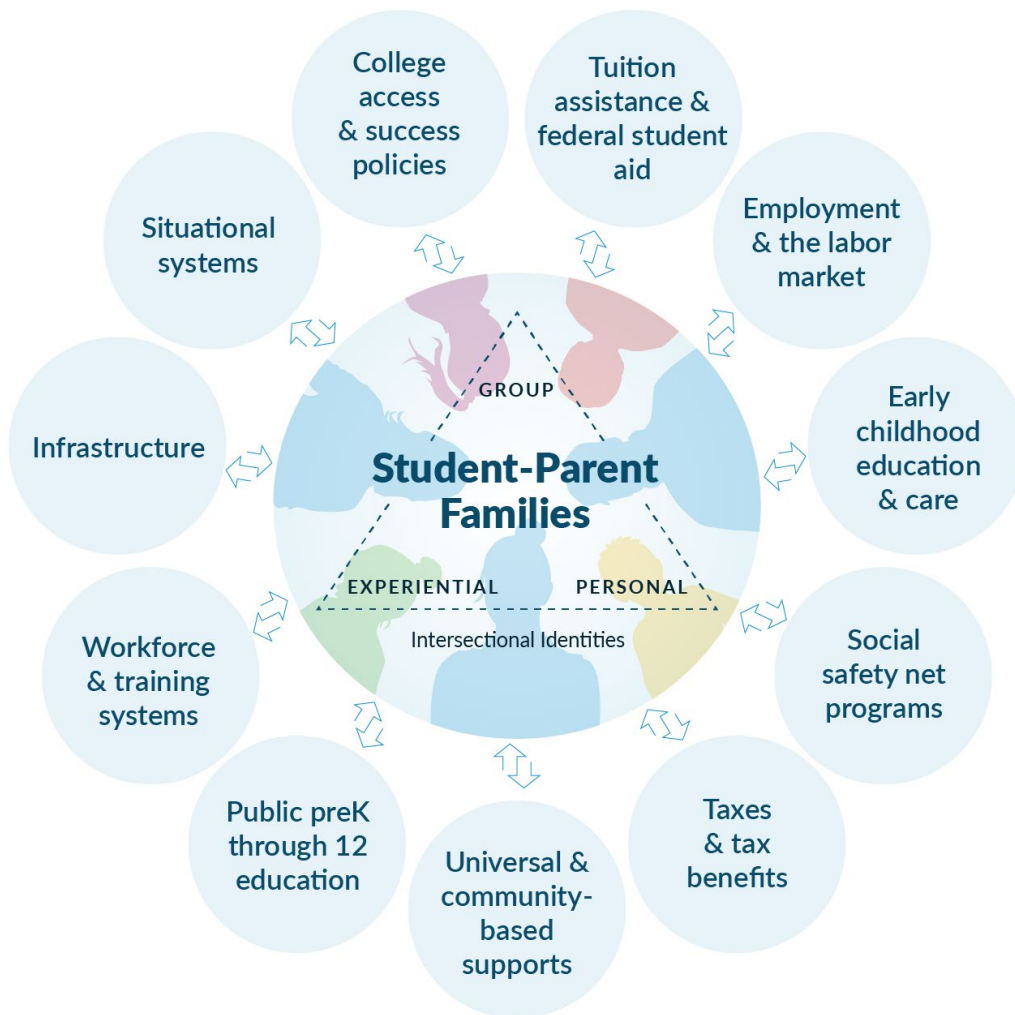
Situational systems may include the child welfare and foster care system, the child support system, fatherhood programs, veterans' services and military (and spousal) benefits, the immigration system and related services, the justice system, additional support for people with disabilities and neurodiversity, teen and young parent programs, and tribal policies. Few, if any, of these systems are designed with parenting students in mind, and the complexity of the framework emphasizes how important it is to coordinate and cohere policy systems to give student parents the bandwidth and support to complete college degrees and achieve other education and life goals.

At the center of the framework, we acknowledge the multifaceted, intersectional identities of parenting students could affect how they interact with systems. Identity, family structures, and experiences introduce complexity to their experience, especially given many structural barriers by race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and family status.

Details of this framework and a series of fact sheets annotating the policy areas [are available online](#). The two-page fact sheets serve as a reference for the field to understand how this broad array of systems, policies, and programs function and where student parents fit in.

FIGURE 2

Student-Parent Families at the Center Systems Framework



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The Student-Parent Families at the Center Framework and the recommendations in this report aim to leverage this growing public awareness to inform policy and systems changes that would better support student parents by advancing conversations from focusing on single issues and subpopulations to broader considerations of the many intersecting issues that impact student-parent families. Our hope is that this might lead to a comprehensive student-parent policy agenda across the field.

About the Roadmap

The *Roadmap for Change to Support Pregnant and Parenting Students* summarizes ideas for practice, policy, research, and investment drawn from existing literature and from the project's Leadership Council. This report is version 1.0 of the roadmap because it is meant to provide a starting point for practitioners, policymakers, system leaders, and investors to pursue a common agenda and coordinate collaborative efforts. The goals of this work and the strategies to achieve these goals could and should evolve over time.

Notes on Terminology

Currently, the focus population has many names (see box 1). One of our first recommendations is that members of the field come to an agreement on language and terminology, though inevitably this population will have different characterizations across policy systems. Throughout this work, we have chosen to use common terms interchangeably, especially “student parents” and “[pregnant and] parenting students.” When writing about policy areas that use other language in official documentation, we use those specific terms.⁹

Most of the issues and recommendations in this document apply to all types of postsecondary education providers, including two-year and four-year colleges, workforce and training programs, and adult education providers. For brevity, we often use the term “colleges,” which in the context of this report includes other types of institutions educating adults.

We also acknowledge that developing common language is an iterative process that requires input from many stakeholders. A growing understanding and ongoing refinement of terminology has been reflected throughout the course of this project. The terminology and stylistic editorial choices we use in this work will continue to evolve. For this project, we have developed a shared style guide, representing current compromises and negotiations reached through many discussions. But the terms used and editorial choices made in this roadmap and across the Student-Parent Families at the Center project are not yet settled.

BOX 1

Names for a Student Parent

A parenting student has many names across different systems and policies.

- Adult learner following a career pathway
- Adult learner with dependents
- Caretaker in college
- Displaced homemaker
- Family with parent in college
- Grandparent as a parent in school
- (Legal) guardian
- Head of household
- Independent with dependents
- Low-income mother/father in higher education
- Married student
- Mother scholar
- New majority learner/college student
- Nontraditional student
- One of “the moms” (on a college campus)
- Parent (or parenting) learner
- Parent in education and training
- Parenting student (or scholar)
- Program participant/assistance recipient pursuing education/training
- #RealCollege student
- Single-mother student or single-father student
- Student caregiver
- Student parent
- Student raising children while pursuing an education
- Student who is a parent or serving as a parent
- Student with children
- Student with dependents
- Student with caregiving/parental responsibilities
- Student with young children
- Tax filer with children (independents with dependents)
- Teen/young parent finishing school
- Today’s college students
- Welfare mother in higher education
- Woman in transition
- Worker going back to school
- Workforce development program participant with children

Student-Parent Families at the Center Leadership Council

The cross-sectoral Leadership Council identified promising research, practices, and policies that affect student-parent families during two rounds of meetings and smaller affinity group discussions conducted in late 2021 and early 2022. Many Leadership Council members have lived experience as parenting students in addition to their expertise in policy spaces. We would like to thank our Leadership Council members for contributing to this work (see box 2), as well as others who were not on the Leadership Council but also shared insights (see Acknowledgements section). Many of the recommendations and issues raised in this roadmap come from the lived, professional, and studied expertise of the Leadership Council.

BOX 2

Student-Parent Families at the Center Leadership Council Members

Theresa Anderson (project lead), Urban Institute

Autumn R. Green (project lead), Urban Institute
(formerly at Wellesley Centers for Women,
Wellesley College)

Ali Caccavella, formerly at the Hope Center,
Temple University

Ann Reynolds, Mt. Wachusett Community College

Annalyssa (Gypsy) Murphy, North Shore
Community College

Blake Flanders, Kansas Board of Regents

Carrie Welton, The Institute for College Access
and Success (formerly at Rios Partners)

Chaunté White, American Institutes for Research
(formerly at Institute for Women's Policy
Research)

Chris Baker, Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon

Christopher King, Ray Marshall Center,
University of Texas at Austin (retired)

Cordero Holmes, Arizona State University
(formerly at Rio Salado Community College)

Daniel Kuehn, Urban Institute

David Croom, Ascend at the Aspen Institute

Dee Dee Pfister, Cuyahoga Community College

Earl Edwards, Boston College (formerly at
California Policy Lab, University of California Los
Angeles)

Edward Conroy, New America

Elaine Maag, Urban Institute

Elizabeth Osche, PERG Learning

Erika Kates, Wellesley Centers for Women,
Wellesley College (retired)

Gina Adams, Urban Institute

Grace Yoo, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Heather Hahn, Urban Institute

Heather Willoughby, STARS Program, University
of California Santa Cruz

Hilary Bruck, Office of Planning, Research &
Evaluation, US Administration for Children and
Families

Isis Patterson, Harvard University Graduate
School of Design (formerly at the Office of
Congressmen Seth Moulton)

Jessica Lee, Center for WorkLife Law, Pregnant
Scholar Initiative, University of California
Hastings College of the Law

JoAnna Reyes, Mothers of Color in Academia,
University of California Los Angeles

Kimberly Salazar, University of California
Berkeley

Kristie Adams, Family Scholar House

Kristin Blagg, Urban Institute

Luisa Deprez, University of Southern Maine
(retired) and Maine Scholar Strategies Network

Lynda Villanueva, Lee College

Marcie Foster, Food and Nutrition Service, US
Department of Agriculture

Maria Ramirez, New York University

Nisha Patel, Nisha Patel Consulting

Portia Polk, National Governor's Association
(formerly at Generation Hope)

Sandy Baum, Urban Institute

Sarah Sattelmeyer, New America

Shayne Spaulding, Urban Institute

Sue Popkin, Urban Institute

Teresa Bill, Bridge to Hope, University of Hawaii
System

Tiffany Gusbeth, American Indian College Fund

Venus Barnes, Partners for a Hunger-Free
Oregon

Yasmina Vinci, The National Head Start
Association

Vinice Davis (funder), Imaginable Futures

Marie Hocker (funder), Imaginable Futures

Emily Rae (funder), Imaginable Futures

Student-Parent Families at the Center: Roadmap for Change

The Student-Parent Families at the Center Systems Framework allows us to look across systems to inform the development of this roadmap, which seeks to lay out opportunities for educational institutions, government agencies, organizations, and funders to support the success of pregnant and parenting students and their families as they work toward their education goals. Some proposals are low cost and could be adopted relatively easily with the appropriate willpower, while others are structural or would take substantial investment.

We have organized a series of possible approaches to practice, policy, and system change within eight broad goals, which we call “destinations” to align with the roadmap metaphor (see box 3). Each destination includes multiple mile markers, or suggested approaches, with a set of examples for local and state governments, colleges and other postsecondary providers, community-based and nonprofit organizations, and philanthropic funders. In most cases, we indicate the suggested actor at the broad level (e.g., “colleges” rather than “faculty”) because organizations’ specific approaches will vary based on their context.

A reader interested in making progress toward these goals could create their own roadmap from the suggestions in this document. A [separate appendix](#) provides two worksheets that can be used to identify promising opportunities that merit further exploration. Many suggestions will require implementation steps that also need to be mapped out, including necessary buy-in or sign-off; partners; and financial, material, and personnel resources. Some might require a strategic process. Others could be adopted relatively quickly with the right support. In any case, we hope this roadmap will provide a host of recommendations for practitioners across education, government, and nonprofits to better support parenting students.

BOX 3

Roadmap Destinations

1. Stakeholders are aware of student-parent families and the conditions they face.
 2. Student-parent families experience less time poverty and have sufficient support as they pursue education.
 3. Postsecondary education is financially feasible for parents.
 4. Families' basic needs are met during and after education programs.
 5. Student parents enter and complete education programs and attain good, fulfilling jobs.
 6. Parenting students' children are supported.
 7. Colleges meet their goals by supporting student parents.
 8. Research and advocacy around student-parent services, policies, and investments are sufficient and effective.
-

Destination 1: Stakeholders Are Aware of Student-Parent Families and the Conditions They Face

Awareness is fundamental for all elements of change. Finding common language, recognizing how student parents fit into equity mandates in higher education, and collecting data to characterize their experiences and outcomes will all lead to greater awareness of student-parent families and better outcomes as a result.

Mile Marker 1A: Define Key Terms for the Field

Student parents have many names, and each has a different implication.¹⁰ These names and other language used to describe student parents directly inform data collection and the framing of student and family experiences. For example, biological parents who have a more involved coparent might not identify as “primary caregivers,” even if they cohabit with and provide regular care for their child. Similarly, a student parent who shares custody and care of their children might hesitate to identify as a “student with dependent children” if someone else claims their children as tax dependents. Inconsistent use of terms across efforts may also give the impression that issues only affect niche subgroups of student parents. Although the overall population is diverse, common language can help unify different

programmatic, policy, research, and funding initiatives that fundamentally address a similar set of challenges.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges, policymakers, researchers, and advocates could be more precise about when and how each name for this population is used, which might require explicit discussions about language and purposeful collaboration across the field, ideally guided by the perspectives of diverse parenting students.
- 📍 Every stakeholder could promote asset-based framing in all language, situating the parenting student and their family as a unit of strength rather than a student burdened by their parenthood or at a perpetual disadvantage.
- 📍 Anyone referring to this population could consider all students in a parenting role rather than constraining to biological parents. Nonbiological parents (kinship parenting) or communal caregiving may be more common in certain settings, such as Indigenous communities.
- 📍 Data collection efforts could use language that is as inclusive as possible to count every student with parental responsibilities (see mile marker 1C). Collected data could be disaggregated to identify more specific subpopulations and situations through thoughtfully developed questions or cross-tabulating parental status data with other student demographics.
 - » Oregon’s Higher Education Coordinating Commission (2022) and the Office of Civil Rights (2022) at the US Department of Education have developed inclusive definitions of parental status that may offer useful examples.

Mile Marker 1B: Treat Pregnant and Parenting Student Access Barriers as Discrimination

Recent proposed revisions to [Title IX regulations](#) require higher education institutions to ensure that faculty, staff, and students are aware of Title IX protections, including for pregnant and parenting students (US Department of Education 2022). While prohibiting gender discrimination, Title IX stipulates that educational institutions must provide pregnancy and postpartum accommodations, including for all phases of pregnancy and related conditions.¹¹ Other laws may also mandate accommodations to prevent discrimination, such as protections for people with temporary disabilities and workplace-related laws that may apply to student employees. Because student parents are disproportionately Black and are also overrepresented among American Indian and Alaska Native

students (Anderson 2022; Reichlin Cruse, Holtzman, and Gault 2019), civil rights protections might also be relevant.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Advocates, funders, and higher education accountability stakeholders—including the federal government and accreditation bodies—could emphasize pregnant and parenting student protections under Title IX, the Civil Rights Act (racial and ethnic discrimination), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (real or perceived).
- 📍 Colleges, governments, and other organizations could provide Title IX training and technical assistance for college personnel, covering pregnant and parenting student awareness, accommodation expectations, protections, and resources for families. Information campaigns could help ensure that all students are aware of the rights and services available to them. Colleges could also identify or establish a Title IX staff person specializing in student-parent needs and concerns. Colleges, higher education systems, and states could implement additional guidelines through legislation or policy or voluntarily expand support services (see destination 2).

Mile Marker 1C: Collect Data on Pregnant and Parenting Students

Data can motivate college administrators as well as state and federal policymakers to improve supports, policies, and systems and help these entities better target additional supports.¹² There have been calls for better data on student parents and their experiences, including intersectional identities, situational systems they are involved with, and number and ages of children. Data can also bolster Title IX and other legal protections for pregnant and parenting students. Most currently available quantitative data on college students' parenting status come from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) but do not include student parents who do not file the form.¹³ And even those who complete the FAFSA might not claim their children as dependents for tax purposes, which would not report them as student parents.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Data may allow federal and state governments and colleges to designate student parents as a priority service population, though ideally prioritizing this group does not foster competition for limited resources with other priority groups (e.g., first-generation students, veterans, students of color, etc.). Designating student parents as a priority population might allow

governments to hold colleges accountable for ensuring parenting students achieve comparable outcomes to nonparenting students.

- 📍 Colleges could invest in stronger data collection and storage infrastructure, including functional data warehouse systems and human capital to track, pull, and act on data collected. Colleges may also need staff and administrative capacity to develop an institutional research agenda related to parenting students. Government, philanthropy, or institutional funds could help support these investments.
- 📍 Researchers could use quantitative data to understand differential opportunities for access and success and communicate findings to decisionmakers. These data would ideally connect student-parent characteristics, use of services, and outcomes, allowing for quality research on program effectiveness. Other characteristics or situational systems that would be useful to include (but are not limited to) race and ethnicity, gender, single parenthood, homelessness, former foster youth status, and veteran status. Attaching employment and earnings data, as well as subsequent educational pursuits, could help quantify return on investment.
- 📍 If FAFSA remains one of the few data sources that can identify students with dependents, the federal government could clarify data-sharing standards with financial aid offices, which are often concerned about the Federal Education Record Protection Act (FERPA). The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators released data-sharing guidance and a summary of recent changes to the law that indicate sharing is more allowable than many financial aid administrators believe (NASFAA 2022).¹⁴
- 📍 Other quantitative data sources include collecting institutional data at the student-record level, administering representative or full-coverage surveys that could be disaggregated, or collecting data on program admission applications.
 - » **Administrative data** often require a legislative or administrative request or mandate, such as laws passed in 2021 in Oregon and Illinois.¹⁵ Student record-level data could be attached to other student demographics and academic activities. Data could also be incorporated into statewide longitudinal data systems. Federal data collection through the [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) could be valuable after language and data item specification have been piloted successfully.
 - » **Surveys**, either national or college-specific, delivered routinely could help identify trends, but one-time surveys could also offer a useful snapshot. Ideally, any survey results are shared publicly or at least with campus and community partners. The

federal government could expand national surveys like the [National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey](#) to be representative by state, substate region, or college and change privacy rules to allow reporting at the smallest statistical level. The federal government could also design and launch a new survey, perhaps focused on “new majority” college students (formerly called “nontraditional” college students), including parenting students. Colleges could also run their own surveys. Surveys work best when developed collaboratively, with input from parenting students, but questions on parenting status could be incorporated into existing surveys, such as basic needs assessments. A successful survey effort would build student buy-in to reduce reporting hesitancy. Other efforts to motivate response could include offering incentives (e.g., a raffle), hosting survey completion parties, or incorporating the questions into other required processes (such as updating email passwords).

- » **Admission applications** could help institutions collect information and understand if students who already have children are applying for and being admitted to programs. These data could also help programs prepare to serve the incoming cohort. The [Common Application](#), used by many four-year colleges, asks if the applicant has children and if so, how many—but colleges might not request this data field. Applicants might also be hesitant to disclose their parenting status because of admissions bias concerns. Institutions could avoid real or perceived bias by shielding this item from admission committee members and informing applicants how the data will be used. That said, new proposed Title IX guidance may disallow parenting status from being collected on postsecondary program applications.

📍 Qualitative data could help characterize parenting students’ experiences within and across systems and inform iterative improvements. But “success stories” do not mean systems work well. In many cases, success stories highlight the many obstacles that parenting students overcame to achieve their goals while supporting their families.¹⁶

- » Research using qualitative and participatory research methods focused on students’ and families’ experiences could offer lessons for how processes and outcomes might be improved.

- » Exit interviews with parenting students who have recently or are in the process of stopping out of educational institutions could offer insight as to student parents do not persist and how others could be retained.

Mile Marker 1D: Recognize the Complexity of Student-Parent Families

Multiple pathways could lead people to student parenthood, and each carries its own complexities and challenges. Some student parents are considered **college-bound**, meaning they were already a student, in college, or on a precollege pathway when they became parents. Others are **self-initiated**, meaning they were a parent before they started college and may already be familiar with navigating systems and processes. And more still are **program initiated or workforce driven**, meaning they were already parents and pursued college or a trade school to try to get a better job. Nearly all student parents have complex relationships with multiple policy systems.

In addition, policy systems do not work the same for everyone, and many systems maintain structural barriers rooted in ideologies of exclusion such as racism, classism, sexism, xenophobia, and ableism. Students' intersectional personal, group, and experiential identities are relevant to their experiences in programs, policies, and systems.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Researchers, advocates, and policy system leaders could use the Student-Parent Families at the Center Framework to appreciate the multifaceted nature of student-parent families. They cannot easily be segmented into one issue or policy area without attention to other interacting and intersecting systems. Because these many intersecting systems are not constructed to support their situation, parenting students generally face acute role strain and time poverty, limiting their ability to fulfill academic and family roles while attending to personal care and well-being.
- 📍 All interested stakeholders could appreciate that parenting students are racially and ethnically diverse, come from complex relationship situations that cannot be easily reduced to “married” or “single,”¹⁷ and are often associated with situational systems that add further complexity to their policy system navigation.

Destination 2: Student-Parent Families Experience Less Time Poverty and Have Sufficient Support as They Pursue Education

Time poverty, or not having sufficient time to meet work, school, and familial duties while practicing self-care, is an element of role strain, and it is often exacerbated for parenting students by the various demands of the systems they interact with, in addition to their important jobs as parents, students, and often workers (Wladis, Hachey, and Conway 2018). Easing access to existing supports and streamlining processes, while also developing new supportive resources and policies, would substantially relieve this pressure.

When designing safety net programs and educational systems, administrators could ask, “What would these structures look like if they were made for a working student parent?” They could consider different design approaches for student parents across identity groups and situational systems. This approach centers resources that streamlines processes in an integrated way rather than creating more programs for students to navigate.

Mile Marker 2A: Disseminate Information and Help Student Parents Navigate Supports

With so many responsibilities already taking up their time, many student parents do not have the ability to pursue the full range of available supports. Ensuring that student parents not only know of the resources they can rely on but also helping them navigate those systems can save them time and help ensure better student and family outcomes.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could promote pregnancy and parenting support resources at orientation and semesterly, perhaps in email or text message blasts or through phone call campaigns. They could also physically and digitally advertise supports and information about resources, including publishing a webpage specifically for students with children.
- 📍 Colleges could make the contact points for student parents clear or designate this role if it does not exist. Expanding family resource centers or student-parent center models could help, though more research is needed on program best practices.

- 📍 Colleges could develop statements for faculty to include in their syllabi regarding student protections under Title IX and college policies and the student supports available.
- 📍 Colleges could offer navigators, liaisons, or coaches who are culturally sensitive and trained in intersectionality to help student parents connect with needed resources (NCES 2022)—ideally both for themselves *and* their children. These people could be staff or peers, though it may be useful for them to be closely associated with student affairs and for some to specialize in certain subpopulations of parenting students, such as student veterans, safety net program participants, families experiencing homelessness, and students who were formerly incarcerated. Grants from the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program could partially support a staff role. State or federal governments could require or support roles, such as benefit navigators (as has been implemented in Oregon¹⁸) or a campus-based student-parent ombudsperson.
- 📍 Other systems, such as social assistance programs and workforce development, could also offer navigation services to help parents in their programs understand educational resources and related family supports.
- 📍 Colleges, organizations, and agencies (e.g., safety net and child care supports) could work together to facilitate warm handoffs across programs. Colleges could host safety net workers or community-based organization staff on campus to work with students and even establish support hubs that colocate supports in “one stop shops” on campus.

Mile Marker 2B: Make College Supports Student-Parent-Friendly

Often, college-provided supports need to be adjusted to meet parenting students’ actual needs. Given the constraints of parenting, studying, and perhaps working, student parents may need assistance at nontraditional hours or days, and they may have needs or requests that go beyond those of a “traditional” student.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could offer supports (e.g., tutoring, legal assistance, and food pantries) and open administrative offices, such as financial aid and advising, remotely and during early mornings, evenings, and weekends.
- 📍 Colleges could build packages of integrated supports focused on parenting students. Many institutions already do this for veterans and could replicate those models. Colleges could look

at adapting the federal guidelines in the 8 Keys to Veteran's Success for student parents as well.

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- 📍 Legal services for students could cover interpersonal violence and family law issues and could train parents to be their own effective advocates in custody, child support, child welfare, and other legal administrative processes. Legal services could assist both custodial and noncustodial parents. And colleges could connect with local domestic violence or family law support and advocacy centers to expand capacity.
- 📍 Food pantries on campus could stock child items and allow larger allotments for student parents. Campus pantries or student-parent resource centers could also offer diapers, wipes, clothing, toiletries, and other nonfood items.
 - » Portland State University's Services for Students with Children partners with the university's [Free Food Market](#) to provide stickers indicating a students' family size, entitling them to larger food distribution amounts and child food items. Students with children may also visit the campus food pantry by appointment, helping to reduce time spent waiting in line for food distributions.
 - » During the pandemic, staff from Los Angeles Valley College's [Family Resource Center](#) and CUNY's [Fatherhood Academy](#) delivered care packages containing food, cleaning supplies, diapers, wipes, and child and adult school supplies to student parents' homes.
- 📍 Tax-filing assistance helps students with dependents and private-sector jobs, student employment or trainee positions, as well as situations like complex custody arrangements.
- 📍 Colleges or community-based organizations could offer housekeeping services to parenting students, which may help them recoup time for studying and other responsibilities. Services could be provided through grant or college funding.
 - » This is akin to housekeeping services provided to some Greek-life residences and other on-campus housing arrangements.
 - » In France, safety net programs pay for housekeepers and laundry service for new mothers who have challenges recovering from birth.²⁰

Mile Marker 2C: Align Safety Net Policies and Practices to Support Participants in School

With student parents eligible for so many disparate safety net programs, navigating eligibility requirements, program applications, and recertification procedures could require hours of additional work. In addition, few safety net programs envision participating families who are on a college degree track. Coordinating these programs to better serve families pursuing postsecondary pathways could not only save student parents time but also simplify sometimes contradictory requirements, ensuring families receive public supports for which they are eligible.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 States could take a comprehensive approach to considering education, safety net, and family support program alignment, such as through designated two-generation coordinators. These types of roles could help inform policy and administrative agendas across state systems.
 - » Minnesota used a grant from Ascend at the Aspen Institute to establish a statewide whole family and student-parent coordinator position.²¹
- 📍 Safety net programs—such as [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families \(TANF\)](#) for cash assistance), the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) for food assistance, housing assistance, energy assistance, and child care assistance—could align eligibility, application, and recertification requirements and processes. They could create a streamlined single application form that can be applied across programs, then accessed by all programs that the applicant selects. To support such an application, these programs could keep a repository of documentation paperwork, meaning an applicant only must submit paperwork once (and at coordinated recertification intervals). The programs could ensure that the application system could be completed online and that it is compatible with mobile devices. They could create a smartphone app to apply for and manage benefits.
 - » Initiatives such as the federal Work Support Strategies pilot produced some lessons on possible coordination approaches.²²
- 📍 Safety net programs could verify college enrollment directly from institutions. If college enrollment documentation from the student is still required, it could be limited to once per term, and a single academic counselor, coach, or advisor could be designated and approved to sign off rather than students having to seek signatures from every professor. Safety net programs could coordinate with colleges to ensure the approved person’s name, office location,

and phone and email contact information is readily available to students. This would help program participants avoid disclosing safety net participation to multiple faculty and advisors.

- 📍 Safety net programs could increase passthrough eligibility to save time and energy and reduce the number of times student parents must “prove poverty.” Financial aid offices could directly certify eligibility for social safety net programs for state agencies based on FAFSA data, with student permission.
- 📍 The federal government could continue the temporary policy change enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic that extended eligibility for SNAP to all students who have a \$0 expected family contribution on FAFSA, which would encourage colleges to build on campus benefit navigation capacity.
- 📍 The federal government could work with grocers to expand the number that will accept SNAP benefits for online grocery ordering and delivery.²³ It could also help establish other methods for SNAP participants to pay for groceries from vendors with online ordering who cannot accommodate online SNAP purchasing (e.g., invoicing).
- 📍 The federal government could require grocers to waive delivery fees for grocery delivery using SNAP benefits, or the government could reimburse grocers for delivery costs for SNAP recipients. Colleges, student groups, or community organizations could also work with grocers or community supported agriculture (CSA) farm share coordinators to arrange group deliveries to campus or coordinate food pick-ups where delivery is not available or affordable.
 - » [Amazon Fresh](#) currently waives delivery fees if customers pay with SNAP and meet minimum order requirements.
- 📍 Federal TANF program rules could allow unlimited time in education to count toward work activities, rather than only permitting states to count up to 12 months. States could also count education toward SNAP work requirements, reduce requirements to 10 hours per week, or remove them entirely—research on SNAP has shown that they do not increase work and instead only reduce access to benefits (Wheaton et al. 2021). Programs could exclude income from work-study jobs, scholarships, reimbursable academic grants, and student loans when calculating benefit amounts.²⁴ In addition, guidance from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development related to Title IV student aid could be clarified.
- 📍 Programs could not count time in education and training toward the TANF five-year limit because the limit is meant to give participants a chance to get established in jobs. Dropping time

limits entirely—as some states and areas have done, such as Washington, DC—would also help student parents.

- 📍 In the absence of policy change, organizations or advocates could develop reference documents for caseworkers, advisors, and student parents on how to allow education and training programs longer than 12 months to count toward TANF work requirements (e.g., through internships and work-study). States could leverage low actual TANF work participation requirements because of past credits (OFA 2022) to allow participants engaged only in education to maintain benefits.
- 📍 State and local governments could inform students about safety net pathways designed to support education, such as California CalWORKS’s Self-Initiated Program and Moving to Work in Louisville (California Department of Social Services 2014; Louisville Metro Housing Authority 2022), which supports parents “preparing for work by participating in educational activities.” Researchers could examine the efficacy of special programs for participants in school.
- 📍 The federal government could adjust TANF block grants for inflation, and SNAP benefits to reflect the real cost of living and food. Increasing SNAP benefits would reduce food insecurity among recipients (Carlson, Llobrera, and Keith-Jennings 2021). Alternatively, federal or state governments could increase programs that stretch SNAP benefits further, like the [Double Up Food Bucks program](#).²⁵ The federal government could also increase appropriations for housing supports to reduce competition for subsidies, allowing more priority populations to be served.
- 📍 Safety net programs could train frontline workers to be knowledgeable, approachable advocates for participant educational success. But to do so, staff may need more reasonable caseloads, which would require increased state or federal funding.
- 📍 The federal government could abolish TANF with all its administrative complexities and exclusionary policies in favor of automatic cash payments for families with low incomes. These could follow the model of the 2021 expanded child tax credit (CTC), with automatic bank deposit or check issuance. Or, as an interim measure, the federal government could allow states to pilot guaranteed income programs in lieu of TANF. Researchers could build evidence about how these programs compare with the TANF status quo. Research on guaranteed income pilots like [DC THRIVE](#) have produced promising results.
- 📍 Researchers could produce more insights about the use of programs by student-parent families and the impacts of safety net programs on student-parent families’ financial resources, time,

and other measures of well-being. This analysis could help identify how to align safety net programs better with parenting students' needs.

Mile Marker 2D: Do Not Penalize Parents for Having Children or Navigating Situational Systems

Although new proposed Title IX regulations may require colleges to offer student-families leave from their studies without penalty, stakeholders across education, government, and support services will need to develop formal policies, build awareness, and ensure compliance. This may require changes in how postsecondary programs are offered that enhance flexibility for pregnant and parenting students.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 State legislation like California's AB 2881²⁶ (passed in 2022) could require colleges to provide an easily locatable resource information webpage for students with children, provide priority registration to students with dependent children under age 18 (which also helps identify or count student parents), and establish or expand family basic needs supports on campus. Or colleges could take these actions of their own accord.
- 📍 Colleges could offer course scheduling flexibility, implement rolling admission, and offer required courses multiple times of day and on different schedules (e.g., summer accelerated, asynchronous online, etc.). Colleges could also allow students to switch course sections easily, including between in-person and online and from synchronous to asynchronous.
- 📍 Colleges could implement more online and remote learning opportunities, with synchronous, asynchronous, and BlendFlex or Hyflex options (Rosen 2021). They could support online learning with digital skills training, like [Cuyahoga Community College's basic skills computer course](#). Even when taking courses primarily online, parents will likely still need child care.
- 📍 Colleges could require instructors to implement family-responsive attendance policies, with reasonable guidelines for excused absences and opportunities for students to make up missed work or access class recordings. Colleges may need to invest in more lecture capture recording tools.
- 📍 Colleges could expand retroactive withdrawal policies for students who had an interruption late in the term that affected their final course performance. Colleges or organizations could also inform students of appeal processes for bad grades or academic penalties related to

childbirth, as protected by Title IX. Colleges could make this process straightforward and train Title IX officers how to deal with these requests effectively.

- 📍 Colleges could count a lower number of credits as full time for student parents or allow student parents to enroll part time while retaining benefits and supports typically offered to full-time students. The University of California Berkeley reportedly allows students to decrease their enrollment to less than full time if they are parents, though their registrar site only notes exceptions for students with disabilities as of December 2022.²⁷ The definition of “full time” matters, especially for parents attending college on international student visas that require continuous full-time enrollment. Colleges may need to coordinate with federal and state authorities to make definitional adjustments.
- 📍 Colleges, public agencies, and community-based organizations could smooth experience for parenting students who intersect with other situational systems, such as immigration, veteran services, the foster care system, disability supports, and the justice system. The best way to determine appropriate accommodations is to build communication channels with students about what they need and where they have encountered friction, then coordinate with relevant external offices.

Mile Marker 2E: Help Parenting Students Act as Self-Advocates

Parenting students are capable of learning to self-advocate if they are given accurate and timely information about the systems they interact with. Self-advocacy not only helps student parents and their families get what they need, but it can also build personal leadership skills and force systems to be more accountable to the populations they serve.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could offer appropriate orientations that inform students about how to navigate college systems, perhaps with a segment geared specifically toward parenting students. Orientations could include explanations of college norms, like how to read a syllabus and professor office hours, and how to reach out and ask for help.
- 📍 Community-based organizations could help student parents advocate for themselves by teaching them how systems and supports work and where their situation fits in.²⁸ Neither providers nor colleges should force parenting students to pursue supports they may not want or need.

Destination 3: Postsecondary Education Is Financially Feasible for Parents

As the costs of higher education rise, affording college, navigating financial aid, and managing debt accrued afterward presents a challenge for many students. Student parents in particular face high costs to support their families and find care for their children while they are pursuing their education goals.

Mile Marker 3A: Offer Financial Coaching and Education Tailored to Student-Families

High schools, colleges, and supportive organizations located in places accessible to student parents could help students navigate financial aid and other elements of financial well-being. For example, student parents and financial coaches have become more aware that students could appeal to add their child care expenses to their financial aid package's cost of attendance calculation due in large part to a report from the US Government Accountability Office (2019) and strong publicity efforts by advocates.²⁹ But many people remain unaware that dependent care, housing, food, medical or disability related expenses, technology, and other expenses may also be added to their cost-of-attendance calculation. Other financial complexities of being a student, a parent, and often a worker may also require advanced financial coaching.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Financial coaching or education could include information about the FAFSA and student aid,³⁰ types of student loans, interest rates, the realities of student debt, repayment options (such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and income-driven repayments). They could also help students budget for family needs when they receive large influxes of financial resources when their aid is disbursed and help them develop a strategy for long-term savings. Culturally sensitive coaching that engages whole families is more likely to be effective (Robles 2014). Coaches may also want to be knowledgeable of different cultural perspectives about credit and debt.³¹
 - » Resources like the [SwiftStudent model appeal letter](#) could help students with dependent children appeal financial aid determinations for dependent care costs and for changes in employment.

- 📍 College financial aid offices could clearly inform students with dependents about dependent care allowances and other resources or processes.
- 📍 College financial aid offices or financial coaches could guide students on tax implications of aid, including how different grants or scholarships might count as income for taxes (e.g., Pell grants). Colleges could provide this guidance in partnership with tax preparation services (e.g., VITA) and could colocate financial coaching and tax preparation services. Clear and accessible guidance from the state or federal government on taxability of aid would also be helpful.
- 📍 The federal government or a research organization could create a clearinghouse of financial aid information unique to independent students with dependents.

Mile Marker 3B: Revise Financial Aid Policies

Although the federal government needs to initiate many potentially beneficial changes to financial aid policies, states and colleges could pursue some suggested approaches to make the student aid process easier for student parents.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 The federal government could implement the following:
 - » Simplify the FAFSA form and documentation requirements to ease reporting burden. The FAFSA Simplification Act is a major step, especially information sharing from the Internal Revenue Service (CRS 2022).
 - » Allow for a negative expected family contribution, which may take effect with the change from expected family contribution to a student aid index in aid calculations, as approved in the FAFSA Simplification Act.
 - » Increase or eliminate the time and attempted credit limit for aid, which is now 150 percent of the expected length of a credential.
 - » Ensure taking a one- or two-term leave of absence or reducing to part-time status does not jeopardize aid. This change may be supported by proposed revised Title IX guidance. It could be valuable to impose this requirement on private grants as well.
 - » Advise financial aid offices to provide an appropriate cost-of-attendance calculation and aid package for students who indicate they have dependents, rather than requiring students to appeal. That may mean including child care and

family housing costs automatically, as well as estimated medical and transportation costs. Students could still appeal if needed (see mile marker 3A).

- » Increase federal caps on housing costs in cost-of-attendance calculations.
- » Clarify how paying or receiving child support interacts with financial aid.
- » Provide guidance that child extracurriculars could count as child care costs for aid calculation. Also, provide better guidance and clarification about where financial aid offices have discretion to count these types of costs.
- » Standardize the dependent care allowance across institutions.
- » Offer grace for previous low grade point averages for students returning to school after an extended absence. Alternatively, make the appeals process simpler for returning students.
- » Impose a plain language requirement for all financial aid communication with students and families.
- » Increase the administrative cost allowance so financial aid offices could conduct more outreach and lower the ratio of financial aid officers to students, which would allow more individualized support.
- » Revise the legacy work-study formula to reflect current student needs across institutions and redistribute unused work-study.

📍 States could implement the following:

- » Allow financial aid offices to coordinate with social safety net programs to provide passthrough eligibility and verify income and other household details (see mile marker 2C).

📍 Colleges could implement the following:

- » Train financial aid officers to support students with dependents and ensure they can answer students' questions. They could also train them in how to be approachable, nonbiased, and helpful.
- » Ensure all communication with students is in plain language.
- » Offer retroactive withdrawal and other mitigation procedures so students do not fall into financial aid standing if they need to withdraw from classes because issues related to pregnancy and parenting or if they are returning to college after a period of absence.
- » Share information about parenting students with student affairs offices to provide appropriate supports.

Mile Marker 3C: Financially Support Cost-of-Attendance beyond Tuition

For all students, the full cost of attendance entails more than just tuition, including fees, housing costs, books, transportation, and much more. Student parents in particular need more resources to cover these extra costs, and flexible, need-based aid is the most helpful support. Generally, much merit-based aid is targeted toward students who have other means to support college costs, so moving from a merit-based mindset to a needs-based mindset could increase equity.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 The federal government could increase Pell grants or provide a supplement for student parents. States could also supplement Pell grants or provide support to certain populations, as California does with its CalGrant for students with dependents.³²
- 📍 The federal government, states, colleges, and philanthropy could target more gift aid to students with children (defined more broadly than “dependents” on the FAFSA) and low incomes to help ensure they have enough available aid dollars to meet their full adjusted costs of attendance as caregivers.³³ These programs could be broad or targeted to students in certain types of programs, such as career and technical education students or undergraduate degree-seekers.
 - » [The Ford Opportunity Scholars Program](#) is a philanthropic program that covers student parents up to the full cost of attendance.
- 📍 Student aid programs could support “first dollar” costs, rather than only covering the “last dollar” after all other supports have been exhausted. That said, last-dollar approaches that fill unmet need are still valuable.
- 📍 Colleges could expand tuition remissions for students they employ, including graduate students.
- 📍 Reimbursable grants could cover necessary living expenses, but the federal government will need to provide guidance or change policies so these grants do not negatively affect tax liability or safety nets. Federal and state governments could exempt reimbursable academic grants from income calculations for benefits and taxes, which would also simplify the complex relationship between education grants and tax credits.³⁴
- 📍 Expanding “learn and earn” programs, such as apprenticeships, could help support costs of education. Specialized attention to supporting opportunities within occupations and career

pathways where women and workers with families have been historically underrepresented or unsupported could help advance equity.

- » Workforce development programs could also increase financial support.
 - » Local workforce boards could train American Job Center (AJC) workers on how to use individual training accounts to cover college tuition costs, including for families receiving cash assistance. Kansas modeled this in their [Accelerating Opportunity Kansas](#) initiative.
 - » Federal or state governments could impose strict equity guidelines for AJC workers, and AJCs could provide bias training to ensure they do not use their discretion to provide less education support for workers with children.
 - » The federal government could moderate work-first language in its guidance to AJCs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, allowing more support for broader education pathways. This change may allow credit-bearing and degree programs to be viable training options with support from workforce development programs, though the federal government may need to increase funding.
 - » States could expand use of the 50/50 SNAP Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) program and encourage its use for student-parent college-going costs. (See the [SNAP E&T fact sheet](#) for additional details about the program.)
 - » The US Department of Labor could include student parents as a target population in the Office of Apprenticeship's Diversity and Inclusion Center of Excellence and provide supports.
- » Colleges and governments could work together to rein in costs of higher education or explore new financing models.
 - » Federal or state governments could pursue “free college” models, such as extending universal K-12 education to K-14 or K-16, meaning the first two or four years of college would be supported through taxes rather than charging students. This model is common in many other countries.³⁵ States could also offer students with children or students from low-income or low college-going backgrounds free in-state tuition, such as the policy in Minnesota for former foster youth,³⁶ or fully subsidize career and technical education or certain types of high-demand training programs. Any “free” education program could cover the entire cost of attendance rather than only tuition.

- » Colleges could explore outcomes-based financing, which might include income-share agreements. Hope College in Michigan asks students in their [Hope Forward](#) pilot program to pay back their college after completion as a donation rather than an obligation, with students' education fully subsidized at the outset. These approaches may be particularly promising in short-term programs. The federal government could improve regulations and standards for these alternative finance models and reduce disincentives to similar innovation.
 - » Governments and institutions could explore expanding [College Promise](#) or debt-free college programs.
 - » Colleges could reduce costs of books and supplies by encouraging faculty to adopt [open education resources](#) or through other policies that reduce supply costs (e.g., supply lending programs, library holds, etc.). These types of programs are more common at two-year colleges currently, but four-year colleges and graduate programs could also use these strategies.
- 📍 Colleges could offer bookstore vouchers and could build partnerships with bookstores or with philanthropy to support these subsidies.
 - 📍 Colleges could make students aware of public supports, such as safety net supports and workforce systems (see mile marker 2A), to offset tuition and other costs. College administrators, staff, and faculty could stay informed about what might be available through their state safety net and workforce system programs.
 - 📍 Colleges could waive tuition for students participating in unpaid internships that convey credit.
 - 📍 Colleges can create opportunities to “sponsor” students, which might include paying them for unpaid internships, subsidizing child care and costs of living, or providing other financial supports. These sponsors could include employers (who could be motivated by a tight labor market), philanthropic organizations, community organizations, or individuals. If sponsor-based tuition supports are paid directly to the college instead of reimbursed to the students, parenting students will have more cash on hand.
 - 📍 Community-based organizations could publish clear information about available help as well as guidelines or qualifications for programs and services.
 - 📍 Colleges could strengthen emergency aid programs that provide small grants or loans to students who face unexpected difficulties during the semester, with larger grants for students who are parenting. Some emergency supports available during the pandemic could be made

permanent, but that would most likely require more resources from state or federal governments or philanthropy.

Mile Marker 3D: Support Students Who Need to Earn Income While in School

The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study found nearly 70 percent of student parents held a non-work-study job while in school in 2016, almost 20 percent higher than the rate among students who were not parenting.³⁷ Among those employed, student parents worked an average of 35 hours per week, while employed nonparenting students worked an average of 27 hours per week. Therefore, supporting students who work disproportionately would help parenting students.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could offer on-campus jobs that are flexible, understanding, and accommodating of students' employment needs, including remote work. For students who work off campus, colleges or nonprofit partners could cover work-related costs like clothing and transportation. College partnerships with programs like [Dress for Success](#) could help working students, as well as students transitioning from education programs to careers.
- 📍 Colleges could allow aligned paid work to count for community volunteer hours required by some programs.
- 📍 Colleges and public agencies could better align work requirements with student employment and internship opportunities by ensuring that their combined work and education hours sufficiently fulfill all required work hours (see mile marker 2C).

Mile Marker 3E: Reduce Student-Parent Debt

Many parents leave college with high debt burdens, beyond the typical amount that independent students without dependents carry. Black mothers in particular carry the largest education debt (Reichlin Cruse, Holtzman, and Gault 2019). These debts could severely limit future education and employment opportunities, as well as asset and wealth accumulation.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Federal debt or interest cancellation could reduce debt burden, especially if cancellation is targeted to parenting students or those who receive Pell grants. The federal government could extend existing practices that offer larger loan forgiveness amounts to Pell Grant recipients or

increase loan forgiveness for students who attended college with dependents, who could carry larger debt burdens because of caregiving-related costs.

- 📍 Federal debt or interest cancellation could also be offered to those who have defaulted on their debts, as long as there are safeguards to prevent people from not paying debts they could pay. Or the federal government could extend the grace period for people currently in student loan default.
- 📍 The federal government could lower income-driven repayment minimums, which was included in the 2022 student loan reforms (White House 2022).
- 📍 The federal government could make temporary changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program permanent.³⁸
- 📍 All stakeholders could help people who hold student debt be aware of policy changes and the actions they need to take within certain timeframes. Safety net programs, colleges, and nonprofit organizations could run awareness campaigns and help with paperwork.
- 📍 More research on student-parent debt—including disaggregating data for different demographic groups, education trajectories, and family situations—may help inform further policy solutions. A lack of consumer protections is believed to be leading to a growing racial wealth gap from student debt (Hasan, Lucas McKay, and Smith-Ramani 2022; Wedderburn and Biddle Andres 2020).

Destination 4: Families' Basic Needs Are Met during and after Education Programs

As acknowledged in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, physiological needs, safety, love, belonging, and esteem are necessary building blocks to self-actualization through education.³⁹ All stakeholders could collaborate to help students and their families meet their needs for income, food, housing, health, mental health, well-being, transportation, and technology, which will help them succeed in their schooling.

Mile Marker 4A: Support Student-Based Families' Basic Needs and Consider Them in Design

College enrollments are declining while the cost of necessities is increasing, putting strain on institutions and families. Basic needs professionals have reported that housing and child care for students with children are among the most challenging to address and may require more public funding.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 State and federal governments could expand funding supports for higher education institutions that help students with children. Colleges could pass through government funding from sources like the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund to students with families to help ease hardship.
- 📍 Colleges could expand residential programs for student-parent families, like the Keys to Degrees program at Endicott College (Green and Wylie 2015) and the [Jeremiah Program](#). These provide families with wraparound supports as parents pursue their education goals.
- 📍 Program designers and funders could consider the intention behind emphasizing or specifically targeting single-parent students for supports.⁴⁰ If the purpose is truly to serve those without a coparenting partner, using terms such as “solo parent” or “lone parenting” could be more effective in communicating this purpose. If the goal is to target families experiencing poverty, income or asset criteria may be more effective.
- 📍 Research on the effects of basic needs supports, universal supports, and new infrastructural investments on parenting students and their families may help justify or identify opportunities to refine future investments.

Mile Marker 4B: Help Student Parents Have Sufficient Income

Student parents need income beyond covering the cost of education (see destination 3) to ensure their families are healthy and stable while they are in school. Students are often asked or required to participate in work-based learning through internships, practicums, clinicals, or co-ops. These experiences are valuable but are often unpaid,⁴¹ sometimes because industry policies prohibit it.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Industry associations, federal and state governments, and colleges could change rules and practices to ensure students are compensated for their work. Alternatively, colleges could

provide scholarships or stipends for students participating in uncompensated work-based learning activities, possibly funded by work-study dollars or grants. The federal government may need to change work-study rules to make this compensation a permissible use of funds.

- 📍 Microinternships or fellowships could provide paid opportunities for students to contribute to project-based assignments throughout the year, which may offer more flexibility and access to students with children than traditional unpaid internship placements.
- 📍 State policies that increase access to family cash assistance programs, such as TANF, for students who are parenting could be important. Many of these strategies appear under mile marker 2C. In addition, colleges could ensure that TANF electronic benefit transfer cards are accepted across campus.
- 📍 Federal and state governments could reduce benefit cliffs and negative benefit interactions (see Anderson et al. 2022) by minimizing competing requirements between safety net, work-study, financial aid, and other programs. Programs could also taper individuals off benefits once they no longer qualify. And the federal government could help smooth processes for families who transfer benefits across state lines, which may be common among upwardly mobile student parents or those who win scholarships for out-of-state schools.
- 📍 Federal and state governments could raise and index the minimum wage to a local living wage and eliminate current minimum wage exemptions for certain classes of workers, including full-time students and workers with disabilities.
- 📍 Federal and state governments could explore universal basic income strategies or job guarantees. The stimulus check programs during the pandemic offered a form of universal income and could be extended with limitations to help families with children or families below a certain adjusted gross income threshold. Generally, more government supports could become universal to ensure families who were not centered in policy design do not fall through the cracks.
- 📍 Colleges and organizational partners could help students maximize tax credits and refunds, including the earned income tax credit (EITC), the American Opportunity Tax Credit, the Lifetime Learning Credit, the CTC, and others. State and federal governments could expand EITCs and CTCs and create simpler policies and clear guidance for how income, education grants, and student aid interact with taxes. Federal policymakers could consider extending the definition of work for the EITC to include those in school (e.g., full-time students with dependents could claim a full credit and part-time students a partial credit). Federal

policymakers could also make all tax credits refundable and paid in advance automatically, like the 2021 CTC.⁴²

Mile Marker 4C: Ensure Convenient and Affordable Food Access

Food security is critical for families' health and for parents to have the physical and mental energy to engage fully with their studies.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Federal and state policymakers could lead a public information campaign or targeted training to increase awareness among agency caseworkers about which students are eligible to receive SNAP, while colleges and organizations could connect student parents with food resources (see mile marker 2A).
- 📍 SNAP benefits could become more accessible to student parents (see mile marker 2C). Colleges could help students budget for family food needs with SNAP benefits and give them recipes and meal plans to stretch benefits further, perhaps in partnership with local community organizations.
- 📍 Colleges could make SNAP benefits more accepted across campus, including among SNAP-eligible food vendors and dining services. States may need to apply for waivers from the federal government to allow student parents to use SNAP benefits for prepared food on campus, but previous precedent has been set with people experiencing homelessness and elderly SNAP recipients able to use benefits for prepared food.⁴³
- 📍 Organizations and colleges managing farmers markets and CSA distribution logistics could consider students who live off campus and have family responsibilities during evenings and weekends in their planning.
 - » The Portland Saturday Farmer's Market operates on the Portland State University campus.
 - » The [Love Farm's CSA](#) farm share program offers a drop-off location at the National University of Natural Medicine.
- 📍 Colleges could provide additional food or subsidies for parents, such as grocery gift cards, campus cash, or food pantries stocked with child-friendly food items. They could also coordinate a food distribution program to families in campus family housing, perhaps in

partnership with local grocery stores or farms. And colleges could provide space and supplies for community gardens or farms on campus so student-parent families could grow food.

- 📍 Colleges could provide student-families more free prepared foods and heat-and-eat style family meals. Catered campus events could also help students bring home leftovers by requesting a stack of to-go boxes and plasticware when sending in the order.
 - » The University of Massachusetts Amherst's [Dinner on Us](#) series offered a freshly prepared healthy meal served family-style for parenting students and other campus community members and their children, after which parents were invited to participate in workshops on parenting-related topics while children participated in literacy games and activities in an adjacent space.
- 📍 Colleges could offer a family meal plan for on-campus dining options, or free or reduced-price meals for children. The federal government could also clarify how access to a campus meal plan affects students' eligibility for public food assistance benefits and how these sources of nutrition support could be better aligned.
 - » Endicott College did not charge for child meals in its Keys to Degrees program, with babysitters and other caregivers able to bring children to dining halls even if the parent was not present.⁴⁴ Students with children were also afforded a wider range of meal plan options, including lower-priced plans that allowed them to combine dining hall meals with food prepared at home and purchased with food assistance benefits.
- 📍 The federal government could extend the Free and Reduced-Price Breakfast and Lunch Program, typically offered in public K-12 schools, to college students on campus. At minimum, colleges offering precollege program, such as alternative high schools, dual enrollment, and precollege pathway programs could use Free and Reduced-Price Meals funds to extend campus meal benefits to these students.
- 📍 Researchers could produce more insights about food insecurity among student-parent families and how to address it, including qualitative research.⁴⁵ Researchers might also consider incorporating family meals or snacks as part of data gathering activities. Focus groups engaging student-parent families, for example, commonly offer child care and family meals for parenting participants and collaborators.

Mile Marker 4D: Provide Affordable On-Campus Housing

With shrinking on-campus family housing and generally rising costs, housing supports are increasingly critical for parenting students and their families. Much campus family housing stock was built in the mid-20th century,⁴⁶ and it is being replaced with nonfamily units.⁴⁷ Advocates have raised concerns that the lack of campus family housing could constitute a form of exclusion and might violate Title IX and other federal and state civil rights laws (Tanner 2017).

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could leverage student-parent enrollment data to plan on-campus family housing expansions for student-parent families, aiming for capacity and occupancy rates comparable with those for other student housing. This might involve renovating existing family housing infrastructure in addition to adding new units.
- 📍 Colleges could set rent to ensure students are not rent burdened while living on campus, perhaps through a sliding scale.
- 📍 Federal, state, or local investments in campus family housing or an increase of general institutional support may be necessary to offset the costs of these approaches. Campus housing agencies could also accept Section 8 housing choice vouchers to offset costs. The federal government could expand Section 8 project-based housing guidelines and affordable housing development tax credits to allow colleges to develop more subsidized campus family housing options for student parents. The federal government could also clarify rules about public housing on or near campus. Research on the impacts of this initiative could unearth effective strategies for new rule changes.
 - » The Ohio State University’s Buckeye Village Family Housing previously offered a project-based Section 8 housing subsidy for some residents, but this program was discontinued because of rule changes—and the complex was scheduled to be demolished.⁴⁸
- 📍 Colleges could help students access housing assistance, and policies could change as described in mile marker 2C. In addition, federal, state, and local subsidies could offer a 12-month grace period when participants exceed income eligibility, reducing the cliff effect. And families with housing vouchers could be given flexibility to port vouchers to other states in this period to pursue promising job opportunities without facing immediate housing uncertainty.

- 📍 Colleges could partner with safety net programs and affordable housing developers to build housing for students with children, which could both extend housing and supportive services to a greater number of student-parent families.
 - » Examples include Buckner Family Pathways at Angelina College in Lufkin, Texas;⁴⁹ Family Scholar House in Louisville, Kentucky;⁵⁰ the Jeremiah Program in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, Fargo/Moorhead, North Dakota, and Austin, Texas;⁵¹ and Columbus Scholar House in Columbus, Ohio, with the Ohio State University’s ACCESS Collaborative program for parenting students.⁵²
- 📍 Colleges could develop partnerships with owners of nearby affordable properties with good reputations to reserve units for student-parent families while the college provides support.
- 📍 Colleges and other education providers could engage families who are already living in project-based subsidized housing developments.
 - » Multiple programs in Boston, Massachusetts, provide education, training, and career pathways services for families living in public housing, including the Tierney Learning Center,⁵³ Julie’s Family Learning Center,⁵⁴ and EMPath’s Flagship Career Family Opportunities program.⁵⁵
- 📍 Colleges, community-based organizations, and student groups could organize student cooperative housing options for families, which would afford opportunities for parenting students to take on leadership roles.
 - » [Co-Abode](#) is a community-based organization that organizes and connects single mothers who are seeking options for shared housing, but it does not specifically focus on student parents.
- 📍 Communities could expand affordable housing options through local and state policies.

Mile Marker 4E: Help Student-Parent Families Maintain Their Health

Being in good health and ensuring family health is critical for parenting students to keep up with their studies and enjoy a full and vibrant life.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- Colleges could offer dependent or family coverage on student health insurance plans at an affordable cost. Family health insurance policies could be included in cost-of-attendance calculations for students with dependents, and colleges could subsize health insurance for these students using institutional dollars, student government directed fee allocations, external funding from state or philanthropic sources, or private donations. State governments and colleges could explore using flexibilities offered by the [Center for Medicaid and Medicare \(CMS\) Innovation Center](#) to leverage Medicaid funding toward covering family health insurance premiums for student-parent families.
- Federal and state governments could expand public and subsidized marketplace health care and generally encourage health insurance to disassociate from employment or student status, which can perpetuate inequities in quality and access and limit student and worker mobility options.⁵⁶ The federal government could provide better information about special provisions for public health insurance coverage for survivors of domestic violence or abandonment (CMS 2019). Federal and state governments could also reduce disincentives for families to report an involved father to receive Medicaid. Because these issues are sensitive, public agencies could train intake specialists and caseworkers about how to inquire about domestic violence and abandonment in a way that does not retraumatize survivors.
- Under new proposed Title IX regulations, colleges will be required to provide lactation spaces for parents on campus that are open to students. Colleges could surpass the basic requirements to ensure comfort, sanitary upkeep, access to power outlets for electronic breast pumps, sinks to wash and sanitize pumping equipment, and freezer or refrigerator access for storing pumped milk while on campus.
- Colleges could offer students family leave without penalty to their insurance, academic standing, or financial support package. The new proposed Title IX regulations may require these steps, at least for shorter leaves, but new guidance may require students to enroll in courses during a planned leave and make up work missed during excused absences.
- Colleges could offer OB-GYN and pediatric care at campus health clinics or develop partnerships with local providers that will accept student health insurance and public insurance (i.e., Medicaid and Medicare). Student health centers on campus could expand training about specialized health and wellness needs commonly experienced by students with children. Campus clinics could preassess the complexity of a student's health needs before their appointment, so sufficient time can be dedicated to treating them.⁵⁷
- Medical facilities on campus could accept public insurance.

- 📍 The federal government could increase benefits associated with Supplemental Security Income for children and provide services, including better support for families to care for children who have a physical or mental disability.
- 📍 The federal government could reign in the costs of health care and prescriptions for families through stronger regulation and oversight of providers and drug manufacturers or other cost-reduction incentives.

Mile Marker 4F: Value Mental Health and Well-Being

Mental health and well-being is a basic need like the others on this list, and research has shown that parenting students struggle more than other students with mental health challenges and often feel out of place or unwelcome on college campuses (Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the JED Foundation 2021). Student parents are more likely than other students to report feeling stressed, overwhelmed, or depressed while navigating complex responsibilities and struggling with basic needs.⁵⁸ In addition to clinical mental health care, belongingness and social well-being may support mental health and could be promoted through affinity spaces and mentoring or peer supports, family-friendly campus environments, and meaningful efforts to promote equity.

Family-friendly campuses are a critical element of well-being for student parents and their families. Developing family-friendly campuses includes promoting a positive mindset about parenting students on campus (see destination 1) and infusing family-friendly approaches and supports throughout the institution.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 For clinical mental health care, colleges could ensure that parenting students have access to free, culturally appropriate therapists that offer family counseling support and are accessible to women of color and Native American students. Counseling services could be directly offered by colleges or through subsidized or insurance-covered partnerships with local providers (including accepting public insurance). Colleges could also leverage clinical social work or psychology graduate students from their own campus, nearby institutions, or anywhere with teletherapy to help students, within the bounds permitted for unlicensed mental health practitioners.
- 📍 Colleges that have large student populations from specific cultural backgrounds could employ cultural wellness specialists, like [the position at United Tribes Technical College](#).

- 📍 Colleges could provide or connect families to counseling and mental health assessments for children, ideally that are covered by student or public health insurance plans. Some college departments and centers already offer child and family-oriented services as part of educational or research programs. Often these programs target recruitment to families in local communities, but a qualifying student-parent family could also use these services. These programs could expand information and outreach efforts to student families.
- 📍 Colleges and supportive organizations could create affinity spaces and help student parents foster meaningful connections in safe spaces, particularly with other parenting students with similar intersectional identities or situational system involvement. Colleges could also encourage students to establish student organizations on campus for parents. Groups that may particularly benefit from intersectional affinity include Black students, tribal or Indigenous students, first-generation students, immigrant students, student-fathers, and students with experience in the foster care system.
- 📍 Colleges could employ and make different types of mentors available to students. Faculty and advisors in a student's educational field could offer career guidance, academic support, and connections. Volunteers from organizations on campus or in the community could help students navigate available resources and make community connections. Alumni from similar backgrounds could serve as role models, and peers could share knowledge and act as social support.
- 📍 Colleges could use the free [Family-Friendly Campus Toolkit](#) to convene a cross-organizational taskforce and review resources and opportunities for pregnant and parenting students. The Toolkit touches on many issues raised in this document, and we hope this roadmap might be a resource for colleges to generate ideas and strategies for action.

Mile Marker 4G: Make Transportation Accessible

Even if parents are taking classes remotely, families need transportation to get to campus, training locations, or workplaces, while also ensuring their children can safely get to their schooling and activities.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 If public transit exists nearby, colleges could partner with transit agencies to offer students (or perhaps student parents specifically) partially or fully subsidized transportation passes.

Colleges could consider the possibility of offering a “whole family” transit pass, perhaps in partnership with the local school district and transit agency, allowing parents and their children to ride together for one fare.⁵⁹

- 📍 Where public transit does not reach the college or does not connect the college with neighborhoods, employers, and schools, colleges could advocate for local governments to extend or modify routes.⁶⁰ Research on where and how students travel could inform this type of advocacy.
- 📍 Colleges could help student parents who need to commute by car with priority and discounted parking,⁶¹ gas cards, auto repair clinics on campus, and discounted or subsidized car insurance.⁶² Colleges could frame these types of accommodations as efforts to promote equity and inclusion for everyone on campus—including pregnant and parenting students to counter criticism that these types of accommodations are unfair to nonparenting students.⁶³ The federal government could allow car payments to count as a necessary cost of attendance for financial aid and an allowable use of supports.⁶⁴
- 📍 Student-parent programs and resource centers could stock loaner car seats that parents could check out. Programs serving student-parent families could also provide information and assistance to access free car seats through public or nonprofit programs. Colleges could partner with national programs like [Buckle Up for Life](#) to offer child safety workshops and free car seats for student-parent families.
- 📍 Colleges could offer child-friendly van services for families. Public schools or early childhood programs could also offer bus and van services for children, allowing them to be dropped off at locations other than the stop closest to their homes (such as an after-school programs or on a college campus). These transportation providers could ensure that a college campus drop-off stop is part of their route.
- 📍 Colleges could design car-share spots on campus and offer discounted enrollment fees and hourly rates for car-sharing programs such as Zipcar or Enterprise Car Share.

Mile Marker 4H: Provide Reliable, Affordable Technology

In a connected world where more services and coursework are moving online, technology is increasingly a basic necessity, which became especially apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges or local and state governments could provide laptops and internet for students, especially those with children.
- 📍 The federal government could promote recently expanded programs that help students and households with low-incomes access free or low-cost broadband internet and telephone service, such as the Lifeline Program.⁶⁵ For the Lifeline program, government, colleges, and organizations could inform students and supportive programs about changes that improve service, offer comparisons among carriers, and provide student parents with noncarrier phones.⁶⁶ This program would be particularly important for students in rural or remote areas and those who live on tribal lands, where communications providers and infrastructure are limited. Meanwhile, the federal government could increase Lifeline reimbursement rates and provide family service plan options for households needing multiple phones.
- 📍 The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)⁶⁷ and Comcast’s Internet Essentials also offer options for families to obtain free or reduced price high speed internet service.⁶⁸ Colleges, governments, organizations, and companies could expand awareness of eligibility guidelines and help students apply for broadband service through the ACP, Comcast Internet Essentials, and Lifeline (one family could qualify for all three). Colleges and other stakeholders could also help student families recognize and avoid common scams trying to take advantage of these programs.
 - » Microsoft and the Communication Workers of America have a partnership called “Get Connected!” to help more families learn about and get signed up for ACP.⁶⁹
 - » During the pandemic, Comcast launched the Internet Essentials Partnership Program to connect more eligible students with Internet Essentials broadband service (Comcast Cable 2021).
- 📍 College financial aid officers could include technology costs in aid packages rather than forcing students to accrue more debt to cover necessary technology expenses. Financial aid officers are permitted by federal student aid rules⁷⁰ to use their professional judgment to adjust cost of attendance for a computer to support schoolwork.
- 📍 States could partner with colleges to leverage federal funding opportunities created by the [Digital Equity Act](#) to expand access to internet service under the [Internet for All Initiative](#). Digital equity initiatives could target parenting student families within one or more of the priority groups.⁷¹ Colleges could offer free digital skills courses, for example, or make digital skills part of their orientation curriculum.

Destination 5: Student Parents Enter and Complete Education Programs and Attain Good, Fulfilling Jobs

Research has shown that when a student parent completes a college degree, their family's well-being improves over the long term (Anderson 2022). But the payoffs depend on the pathway chosen, and completion depends on receiving appropriate support in a program that fits the family's needs. Supportive employers during program enrollment and following completion facilitate completion and long-term career success.

Mile Marker 5A: Deliver High-Quality Advising at K–12 and Postsecondary Levels

Advisors at secondary and postsecondary levels, and from other organizations, could play an outsized role in normalizing college pathways for young parents and easing educational attainment for student parents of all types. With high-quality academic and career advising throughout their educational journey,⁷² parenting students may be more likely to complete their degrees and obtain postgraduation employment (Fountain and Portillo 2021). Advisors are most effective if they are culturally sensitive and are people students trust (NCES 2022).

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 In communities with low college-going or strong aversions to young or unmarried parenthood, normalizing college works best when it begins early, in elementary or middle school.⁷³ In these areas, leaders could establish programs focused on girls of color from low-income backgrounds *and* their parents or caregivers, perhaps with programs for boys as well. They could also ensure that young parents, especially women of color, are not directed to lower-quality high schools that reduce their opportunities to go on to postsecondary education.
 - » Cuyahoga Community College partners with Cleveland Municipal School System to create [Parent University](#), a program designed for parents and caregivers of students in the Cleveland municipal school system who want to pursue a college degree or take college level classes.
- 📍 Advisors could offer a range of options across short-, medium-, and long-term programs, without limiting a student parent's potential attainment. Ideally career pathways could have stackable credentials, so opportunities are available to build skills and advance in a career

without committing multiple years to an initial education before obtaining a family-supporting job.

- 📍 Advisors could help students find realistic and valuable programs by providing information about job prospects, average salary ranges, student debt load, and return on investment. Some higher return-on-investment pathways may be in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, which have historically been dominated by white and Asian males (Okrent and Burke 2021). Student-mothers, especially women of color, may need additional support to navigate cultural barriers and discrimination (e.g., Alfred, Ray, and Johnson 2018; Reyes 2011), and [Title IX tools from the Pregnant Scholar](#) may be helpful. Colleges and employers could seek to make STEM pathways more inclusive to reduce student and worker barriers and discriminatory experiences.
- 📍 Employment advisors and workforce programs could confront gender, racial, and socioeconomic patterns in education programs and career paths. Pathways historically dominated by women tend to be lower compensated and lower status.⁷⁴ Leaders in highly compensated, high-status pathways could uplift the successes of women of color and people from other excluded groups, could enact no-tolerance policies against harassment, start mentorship programs (in which mentors are compensated for their time and credited in their career advancement), and pursue other supported pathways. In addition, female-dominated pathways could be better compensated and respected, which might require more union organizing, government regulation or subsidies, or other coordinated efforts to improve job quality.

Mile Marker 5B: Assist with Career and Future Planning

Students may come into education programs without a clear idea of their ideal career trajectory, and they may not have the time and space to explore multiple paths. A navigator or other similar support person could help them make space to assess and map their options and opportunities.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Professional mentorship from instructors, alumni, or community members could help provide examples and opportunities, which could bridge gaps in social capital. Colleges, employers, community-based organizations, or workforce organizations could offer mentorship programs.

- 📍 [Roadtrip Nation](#) encourages career explorers to “define your own road in life” by offering online tools, resources, mentoring connections, documentary films, a free textbook, and digital curriculum, which may offer a useful resource for student parents and their advisors to explore potential careers and fields of study.

Mile Marker 5C: Implement Flexible and Effective Transfer Pathways and Policies

Transfer pathways may require state and college administrators to develop articulation agreements, credit transfer agreements, and credit for prior learning assessments. When constructed well, these structures could allow students not only to transfer from one credit-bearing program to another, but also transfer from noncredit programs into for-credit pathways and get recognition of skills they gained in the workplace. A well-constructed transfer pathway creates a “no wrong door” approach to postsecondary education, which could benefit students who may be coming into school with children.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could coordinate with high schools to help student parent apply and matriculate to college smoothly.
- 📍 College administrators could make transfer processes among colleges seamless, minimizing the amount of paperwork required of students. When students want to transfer into programs with relevant experience or noncredit workforce training, colleges could create opportunities for students to easily obtain credit for prior learning. Although better transfer processes should lead to less frequent appeals, college staff should make students aware of how to navigate appeal processes for credits or credentials that do not transfer.
 - » [College Unbound](#), a baccalaureate institution in Providence, Rhode Island, targets adult learners and offers prior learning credit (Learning in Public) for experience related to parenting, safety net program participation, and prior learning acquired through jobs or noncredit training experiences.
- 📍 After students transfer, colleges could provide ongoing support, including efforts to build belongingness, help them acclimate to the new learning environment, and navigate available resources.

Mile Marker 5D: Design Family-Friendly Career Pathways

Student parents often have gaps in their education or may have received inadequate secondary preparation, leading many to enroll in college with some missing skills. But developmental education courses tend to be time intensive and demoralizing for students (Schak et al. 2017). Family-friendly pathways allow students to catch up quickly and have flexibility to succeed while juggling caregiving and other responsibilities. Career pathways may start before college and extend throughout one's career.

Competency-based or self-paced pathways may be particularly parent friendly as they give students an opportunity to receive recognition for skills they already possess. Self-paced programming, sometimes called asynchronous learning, allows students to move as quickly or slowly through the material as they desire. Asynchronous models work better when students have access to instructors or other resources to reinforce their understanding of the material, as well as academic support like virtual writing or math tutors.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 High schools could create college dual-enrollment programs targeted to student parents, with appropriate scheduling considerations, child care, and social supports.
- 📍 States and colleges could expand integrated education and training programs, especially those targeted toward students with children. These programs support dual enrollment between high school and college or between adult education and college.
 - » [Washington State's I-BEST model](#), which allows for students to enroll concurrently between high school completion or English language programs and credit-bearing college career and technical education programs with additional support, has been replicated multiple times throughout the country, including [Accelerating Opportunity](#) and MIBEST (Briggs et al. 2022). I-BEST has demonstrated evidence of effectiveness (NCES 2020). It has not yet been piloted with an explicit focus on parents.
- 📍 Colleges could lead developmental education reform efforts that accelerate progress through remedial coursework, making the college experience more affordable, quicker, and more satisfying for students.
- 📍 College and career pathways could be designed with parent success in mind, including building child care or child engagement, flexible but rigorous expectations, and family-friendly jobs (e.g., predictable schedules and reliable hours) into the program design. Postsecondary programs

could let children see what their parents are learning, through models such as [the Two-Generation Classroom](#), family days, and other child engagement activities.

- 📍 Federal and state departments of education could review disincentives to competency-based education, such as funding models based on variations on seat time.
- 📍 Colleges could offer opportunities for program acceleration, such as summer academic programming and intensive courses.
- 📍 State and college expansion of SNAP E&T-reimbursed programs, as mentioned under mile marker 3C, could allow for more career pathway opportunities for students who qualify for SNAP. Education and training providers could expand SNAP E&T programs beyond short-term STEM training to include career-ready fields in the social sciences, arts, and humanities at associate's and bachelor's degree level. Local workforce development boards could build close relationships with human services offices and promote SNAP E&T as an option to help SNAP recipients pursue postsecondary education. And states and colleges could conduct outreach to SNAP-eligible students to see if they qualify for SNAP E&T reimbursements.
- 📍 Colleges could work with employers to understand which skills are necessary for certain positions, so students are not required to attain higher credentials than they need to do the work effectively. These close connections to employers could be particularly valuable in rural areas where job options are more limited.
- 📍 College programs and employers could offer paid on-the-job experience through federal work-study, paid internships, or apprenticeships to not only develop students' skills, but also fill in earnings loss for students as they pursue their education. Expanded apprenticeship models, with all the supports afforded to traditional students, could be efficient and effective for student parents who need earnings while they study and want to enter a career seamlessly. Colleges and employers could also expand apprenticeship programs geared toward women and those with families.
- 📍 States and colleges could facilitate students accessing good jobs (mile marker 5E) through employer partnerships, gainful employment guarantees, or subsidized placements (i.e., paying a percentage of salary for an initial period). Subsidies could be partially supported through work-study if the federal government changes the rules to allow work outside of a student's college.
- 📍 Researchers could produce more evidence about career pathway outcomes for parenting students by linking earnings data and tracking subsequent education, as discussed under mile marker 1C.

Mile Marker 5E: Develop Supportive Employers

Student parents may face many issues when entering the workforce, including benefit cliff effects, tax complexities, unpredictable or shifting schedules, and expectations for outside-of-work activities that are not family friendly (e.g., happy hours without provisions for children, evening events). Many of these issues could be ameliorated by supportive, knowledgeable employers who offer relevant supports.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- Colleges and organizations could inform employers about issues facing workers who have children and are also in school, boosting the voices of those workers who may have trouble getting through to employers on their own.
- Employers could offer financial support, ideally as a direct payment to the school, for continued education and training. They could also give employees time at work to engage in education and training (effectively paying them for school and reducing role strain).
- Employers could pay students for internships. State or federal governments could require compensation for internships (see mile marker 4D).
- Especially with the pressure of a tight labor market, employers could develop family-friendly careers, perhaps with guidance from workforce development agencies. These practices might include allowing employees to schedule irregular hours between classes, offering flexible remote work policies and schedules, expanding asynchronous positions, and giving employees flexibility or leave during child school breaks.
- Employers could address inequitable treatment in the workplace by engaging equity advisors, auditing existing company practices, and promoting policies that encourage workplace equity, such as conducting pay and promotion equity analyses, working to remove bias during hiring and within the workplace, and promoting an inclusive workplace culture.
- State and federal governments could encourage better employee benefits and supports for students (such as educational assistance and paid family leave) through tax incentives and labor protections. Where employers do not offer paid family leave, governments could create public paid family leave programs, as has been implemented in several states.⁷⁵ These types of policies move toward disassociating benefits from employment and making them universal, which is more equitable and gives workers more mobility options (see mile marker 4E).

- 📍 Researchers could produce more evidence about the return on investment to the employer and society of hiring student parents into family-sustaining careers, implementing family-friendly policies, and supporting employees' continued education and training.

Mile Marker 5F: Hold Colleges and Programs Accountable

Additional research on the return on investment of postsecondary education for parenting students could shed light on how to reduce the costs, increase the benefits (monetary and otherwise), and inform new policy or practice solutions. With better data on credentialing, career and technical education, four-year degree, and graduate programs, stakeholders could more readily hold institutions accountable.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Federal and state governments could require colleges to inform students and their advisors clearly about the labor market prospects of different career pathways. Governments and researchers could use earnings thresholds and debt-to-earnings ratios, among other measures, to assess program quality. It is important that insights are shared with administrators, practitioners, and with student parents themselves.
 - » [Kansas DegreeStats](#) links college program data with earnings records in a public dashboard that reports actual costs and earnings outcomes for undergraduate degree completers.
- 📍 Federal and state governments, as well as accreditation bodies, could continue to crack down on exploitative education programs, which have disproportionately targeted outreach toward women of color. Governments could frame all colleges as responsible for helping students secure decent jobs.
- 📍 Federal and state governments could incentivize or require colleges to ensure that parenting students complete programs at the same rate as nonparenting students *and* that they are not burdened with much higher debt (note that this requires high-quality data).

Destination 6: Parenting Students' Children Are Supported

Because student parenthood is a two-generation experience, attention to child well-being is critical while parents are in school. Research has suggested that, on average, children struggle when their parents go back to school, displaying behavioral challenges even as they perform better academically (Anderson 2022). To relieve the burden on families, children should be in good care settings and ideally take part of the parents' learning experience.

Mile Marker 6A: Help Parents Access High-Quality, Affordable Child Care

Some research has suggested that campus child care may lead to a 3.5-times higher on-time graduation rate and a 1.7-times higher persistence rate (DeMario 2021), though more research would be valuable. Colleges could partially support on-campus child care with the federal CCAMPIS grant program or Title III and Title V funding for Black colleges and universities and Hispanic-serving institutions, respectively. Recent changes to CCAMPIS made it more generous to colleges, by increasing the minimum and maximum grant amount and providing more flexibility around qualified care providers.⁷⁶


“Bridging the Gap,” a project by the Urban Institute, explored many issues related to parents receiving publicly subsidized child care while pursuing education and training.⁷⁷ Many of the recommendations below that relate to Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and child care supply are explored in more depth in those publications.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 The federal government could create an early learning and care entitlement program with copayments determined by income. Any parent activity requirements could include education. Universal free education could be extended to preK, and state and federal governments could improve child care supply and quality, allowing CCDF to focus on after-school care and other care needs. These were all proposals included in the Build Back Better bill that failed to pass in 2021 (Guarino 2021). More details about opportunities in absence of this legislation appear below.
- 📍 One of the most cost-effective strategies to support child care needs might be offering navigation assistance. Colleges could employ child care navigators or partner with local [child care resource and referral agencies](#). Colleges could automatically offer navigation services if

students indicate they have dependents on the FAFSA or in other ways (e.g., joining a campus child care waitlist or applying for priority registration).


- » Navigators could curate information about and build partnerships with child care providers, including large centers and smaller providers. An updated, searchable database could be helpful for families, ideally with links to the state licensing and inspection reports. The [Campus Child Care Homes Network](#) at University of Michigan curates a network of home-based providers compiled and maintained by the college.
- » Navigators could help parents set their schedules in advance and meet enrollment deadlines (e.g., for Head Start). Scheduling support might require help from the student's academic program and from the student's employer. Offering spring or summer workshops could help parents think in advance about enrolling in academic-year care.
- » Navigators could help parents understand available financial resources to offset the cost of care. Partnerships among colleges, workforce development agencies, state child care agencies, safety net agencies, and community-based organizations could help all parties understand what is available and how student parents could qualify.

 Colleges could increase affordable on-campus or near-campus child care options.

- » Colleges could inform on-campus child care expansions by collecting data on the potential need for child care services through institutional records (see mile marker 1C), existing program waitlists, or surveys administered by campus child care programs or stakeholders.
- » To expand child care resources on and near campus, colleges could build partnerships with [Head Start](#), nonprofit providers, and for-profit providers (though for-profit providers may have varying quality and could come at a higher cost). Colleges could also offer incentives for providers to open close to campus, either financial or by providing supports or referral pipelines.
- » Many campus child care providers operate as their own business, with little support from the college.⁷⁸ Campus providers tend to charge market rate as a result, which could be unaffordable for students (and often other college employees). Colleges could reconsider this approach and begin to treat child care like any other necessary student service that is subsidized by tuition, fees, and

other funding sources. Colleges could also identify a point person to coordinate child care efforts.

- » Because on-campus child care centers primarily serve faculty and staff and may be unaffordable to students, colleges could designate a certain number of slots to be reserved for part- and full-time students at a reduced tuition rate (perhaps a sliding scale). Centers could also explore employing students from child care development programs, though these positions should be compensated.
- » Funding for on-campus child care expansion could come from the college or external sources. Campus child care providers could ensure they accept public child care subsidies. They could also apply for CCAMPIS grants, though they will want to collect data and begin to develop partnerships with providers in advance of applying. Campus child care centers could apply for the federal Child and Adult Care Food Program to provide subsidized meals for children, reducing their costs and ensuring children have adequate nutrition during the day. Local, state, or federal governments could provide tax incentives to institutions that offer on-campus child care. Governments, philanthropic funders, or local businesses could provide grants to colleges to build, renovate, or rent space for child care or for operating expenses.
- » Colleges could offer more drop-in, evening, and weekend care. Off-hour care could operate in spaces that provide full-time contracted care during the day, perhaps with a second shift of workers or through informal care networks. Generally, colleges could facilitate informal care networks among students, such as [Sitters for Scholars](#). And colleges could help these informal care networks use technology to coordinate modern cooperative care models. State or federal governments could provide colleges resources to understand how to mitigate liability concerns.
- » Colleges, perhaps in partnership with nonprofit organizations, could offer affordable or free camps, after-school programming, and activities targeted to students' children. These are particularly valuable to student parents during public school breaks and during college study and exam periods.
- » State or federal governments and child care associations could establish quality standards for campus-based child care, possibly through the [National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers](#) or a similar organization.

 The federal government could make changes to improve CCAMPIS.

- » The CCAMPIS program could be more appealing to colleges if it better publicized changes, made the application format and process simpler, made previous successful applications available for reference, and offered more application support, such as a CCAMPIS consultant within the US Department of Education or application development workshops. The federal government could also help colleges prepare for the grant application by providing technical assistance on collecting necessary data and developing and maintaining partnerships with care providers. Some colleges have expressed the desire for a grantee learning community.
 - » The federal grant year does not align well with the academic calendar, since it begins at the beginning of October, part-way through the fall term. The federal government could notify grantees of funding awards and renewals earlier and allow grantees a planning period before the next award cycle.
 - » The federal government could encourage partnership between two-year and four-year colleges, allocating more funds for cross-institutional partnerships that promote transfer pathways for student parents, such as the partnership between Mount Wachusett Community College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.
 - » The federal government could clarify or revise current policies about accreditation of care providers funded by CCAMPIS funds. It would be useful if providers could be licensed through the state or as part of the Quality Rating Improvement System instead of nationally accredited. It would also be helpful if qualified providers without a Child Development Associate credential to be allowed to provide care, such as those with four-year degrees or graduate degrees. State licensure may be a better qualification criterion.
 - » The CCAMPIS grant amounts could be weighted more heavily toward two-year colleges and also disassociated from Pell awards, which creates arbitrary limitations for some institutions.
- 📍 The Child Care Development Fund is the largest public child care support, but student parents often struggle to qualify for or maintain benefits (Adams et al. 2014). A WorkRise report and blog post examined the potential impacts of serving student parents better through CCDF (Adams and Giannarelli 2022).⁷⁹

- » Access to the program could be promoted through strategies described under mile marker 2C.
 - » In the absence of large public investments to create a universal care program, the federal government could increase appropriations for CCDF, allowing more eligible parents to receive assistance. Parents in education and training programs could be designated as a priority population, as Georgia has done (Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning 2022), and support would be less competitive if the pool of funds were larger.
 - » State governments could allow CCDF subsidies to be used for a range of settings, including friend and family care. State governments could also allow CCDF subsidies to cover study or homework time, in addition to class or work hours.
 - » States could allow CCDF to cover extracurricular activities that double as child care, including summer camps, sports, clubs, and after-school tutoring.
- 📍 The federal government could reauthorize and expand Head Start and Early Head Start. And state governments could continue to build public preK programs.
 - 📍 Colleges could align classes and other required educational activities with public school and child care schedules and hours. Colleges could also set policies that students must be given substantial advance notice of requirements to be in-person or otherwise unavailable to attend to family needs outside of regularly scheduled meeting times to give students time to arrange care. Colleges, local public schools, and local child care providers could try to align break calendars, perhaps with guidance from local or state government.
 - 📍 Local, state, and federal governments could recruit and support child care workers and other care professionals.
 - » Compensation is a major challenge for the early child care workforce, but in the absence of subsidies, raising wages also raises costs to families. State and federal governments could increase subsidies or provide new support through the tax system, such as a new Caring Occupations Tax Credit. Organizations could also support early child education workers to unionize, possibly providing more consistent pay and benefits.
 - » With expansions of care for four-year-olds (and some three-year-olds) through Head Start, Early Head Start, and preK programs, private care providers may need help from the government or other funders to balance their business model without substantially raising costs. As older children move into public care systems,

private providers are left with more expensive infants and young toddlers, driving costs up.

- » State and federal governments could simplify the child care subsidy and voucher system for providers, allowing more certainty about what their reimbursements will look like and minimizing the administrative burden.
- » State governments could ease licensing requirements, subsidy eligibility, and liability rules to make it easier for providers to provide on-demand and after-hours care.

- 📍 Qualitative research could help decisionmakers understand what parents need and want in child care offerings, which may include nontraditional hours, more home-based care, and different definitions of quality. Student parents' care preferences may differ across geographic (regional, rural, etc.) and cultural settings.
- 📍 Advocacy organizations, funders, employers, and governments could reframe child care from a support for women and children to a fundamental basic support for the economy and as an issue of racial justice. The pandemic revealed how the private child care market, which is undersupplied and overpriced, routinely disadvantages women (Schochet 2019), families with lower incomes (Malik 2019), families of color,⁸⁰ and families striving to improve their opportunities through education (Williams 2022). Broader buy-in might support higher taxes on individuals and businesses and a move toward more public options for care.

Mile Marker 6B: Welcome Children on Campus

Colleges could be more welcoming to students' families, fostering well-being and belonging while reducing the need for students to find on-demand child care for campus activities that would be appropriate for children.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could clarify what policies exist about minors on campus. Some policies have become stricter because of scandals in recent years, so state and federal governments or college associational organizations could help institutions navigate their liability. Colleges could consider loosening regulations, like allowing children in the library if it is currently disallowed.
- 📍 Colleges could open family-friendly study spaces with toys and kid-friendly activities. These could be low cost, like the [Student Parent and Caregiver Study Room](#) at University of Michigan.

- Colleges could offer family-friendly events and activities, like student-parent happy hours that children are invited to attend, family days, and kids' clubs. These could be important for social capital development among students and their children.

Mile Marker 6C: Garner Support from Child-Serving Institutions

Many programs that serve children could and do also serve families. Head Start is designed as a two-generation program with family support, and the public K–12 system has a mandate around family and community engagement.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- Schools and programs for children could host a back-to-school fair or open house geared toward parenting students in which teachers introduce themselves, distribute important information, and discuss new programs and curriculums. Programs could share written documentation of major themes and insights from these events with student parents later on, for those who could not make it or want to refer back to the information.
- Schools and programs for children could use an online platform where teachers and student parents could communicate via discussion boards, private messages, videos, and more. Through this platform, teachers could guide parents who are trying to help their children with certain developmental milestones or assignments, as well as enable parents to provide insights on areas where their child may need additional support.
- Schools and programs for children could create an online calendar, blog, and social media presence where parenting students could stay updated with events and other news related to their children's learning.
- Schools and programs for children could offer out-of-school options for engagement, such as home visits or coffeeshop meetings for student parents who may live far from their children's school.
- Schools and programs for children could partner with colleges and community-based organizations that serve parenting students to assess and address the children's unique well-being needs. They could offer student parents opportunities to have their children assessed for developmental delays or health issues, even for families not currently enrolled in child programs.

Destination 7: College Meet Their Goals by Supporting Student Parents

Students and their families are not the only ones who stand to gain from efforts to support parenting students. Colleges themselves may experience benefits in recruitment and enrollment, promoting opportunities for equal education, and attracting resources to the institution to support students with families and the student body at large.

Mile Marker 7A: Increase College Enrollment

More research on the institutional benefits of recruiting and serving parenting students would help colleges make the case for many of the supports described in this roadmap. Nonetheless, it stands to reason that recruiting students with children who have not met their academic goals and supporting them throughout their education is likely good for college enrollment numbers and for society more broadly.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could actively recruit student parents through marketing campaigns that reflect the supports available on campus and use real stories and photos of parenting students. Active recruitment might be more effective than relying on passive materials like brochures and webpages. Colleges could also build pipelines for recruitment of young parents from high schools or from specific communities like Tribal nations. They could reengage those who have stopped out, perhaps in coordination with the state, like [Mississippi's Complete 2 Compete campaign](#).
- 📍 Colleges, state governments, or philanthropies could develop a grant program to repay small outstanding balances that deter or prevent student parents from reenrolling in school, such as library fines.
- 📍 States could support colleges to be intermediaries for nondegree workforce programs, giving students in these programs exposure to college. Solid transfer pathways could make this option more seamless (see mile marker 5C).

Mile Marker 7B: Provide Equal Education Opportunities

Student parent issues often intersect with protections under Title IX, the Civil Rights Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (see mile marker 1B). Promoting student parents' access and success helps colleges ensure compliance with these mandates while providing equal education opportunities.

Even when colleges follow federal laws and institutional equity statements, almost all systems described in this roadmap that student parents routinely interact with are imbued with racism, sexism, and other forms of exclusion. This has led to underinvestment in supports for people of color, women, and other marginalized social identities. In some cases, the biases of systems cannot be overcome with equity approaches and may need to be dismantled—as suggested in the approaches to replacing TANF with something different because of its racist and sexist foundation (Schram 2005).

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 State and federal governments or accreditation bodies could validate institutions' accessibility for pregnant and parenting students. Analysis of student-parent institutional data (see mile marker 1C) and gathering information and insights from student parents themselves would help verify that pregnant and parenting students have an equal education available to them. The federal government or an organization could provide a description, ranking, or scorecard for family-friendliness at colleges. This could be incorporated into the US Department of Education's existing [College Scorecard](#) database. Researchers could help to determine the appropriate definition of a family-friendly campus, which may evolve over time.
 - » The [Find Your Way project](#) catalogs resources for parenting students at colleges across regions reviewed, which could be expanded to have national coverage.
 - » A list of colleges that have undertaken the Family-Friendly Campus Toolkit process might also suggest family friendliness.
- 📍 Assessments of family friendliness could be the bases for targeted state or federal support, especially if colleges need resources to improve services for students with families or maintain high levels of service when an existing funding stream lapses.
- 📍 Colleges could mention pregnant and parenting students in institutional nondiscrimination statements and policies and ensure that faculty and courses are inclusive of parenting students. Colleges could require antiracism and antibias training, create a designation for family-friendly courses, and establish standardized syllabus statements promoting inclusion.

- 📍 Colleges designated as minority-serving institutions could consider what it means to *serve* a diverse student body rather than only enroll them. These institutions could invest in supports for parenting students and students with other intersectional challenges and structure education differently, with different expectations and flexibilities.
 - » Tribal colleges and universities have often adapted higher education models to fit Native American cultural contexts.
- 📍 Colleges and other institutions of power could name issues of exclusion, which may necessitate personal and organizational self-reflection, and they could diversify key positions to help disrupt biased systems. New personnel will be more effective if they are empowered to speak out without fear and are not disproportionately burdened to do the work of reconciling past wrongs. Colleges could hire diverse faculty, including former parenting students or people with close lived experience, and give them flexibility to design and operate their courses.
 - » Initiatives like [CTE CoLab](#) aim to produce more insights about how to promote racial equity in higher education.

Mile Marker 7C: Attract Resources to Provide Supports

Declines in state higher education appropriations could pose a barrier for colleges that need resources to serve parenting students and “returning adult students” who have different needs without further raising tuition.⁸¹

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Colleges could apply for federal, state, and philanthropic grants that allow them to develop longer-term institutional support infrastructure, and grant-makers could allow these types of infrastructural investments.
- 📍 Federal and state governments could increase funding for colleges serving large populations of student parents, as they do for Title III (historically Black colleges and universities) and Title V (Hispanic-serving institutions) grant programs.

Destination 8: Research and Advocacy around Student-Parent Services, Policies, and Investments Are Sufficient and Effective

In an ever-shifting field with many relevant policy systems, elevating parenting students in leadership roles, building communication and collaboration channels, creating new supportive entities, and finding ways to support research and insight could strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of practice, policy, research, and investment.

Mile Marker 8A: Promote Parenting Students to Leadership Positions

Parenting students are a sophisticated group with strong assets and studied and experiential expertise. They are also diverse, so no individual or small group could speak for all student-parent experiences. Student-parent representation in institutional, research, and public leadership positions could lead to more effective and sustainable efforts to support them. Meaningful leadership includes real power, input, and decision-making, though there may still be support, training, and mentorship and opportunities for growth. To move toward this goal, researchers, advocates, and funders could ensure parenting students are part of problem specification, information gathering, interpretation, and decision-making processes in meaningful ways that are not limited to storytelling or carefully managed participation, which could be interpreted as patronizing.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Researchers, advocates, and funders could help create leadership pathways for current or former parenting students and could compensate student-parent participants at a rate commensurate with their experience and role.⁸² The Family-Friendly Campus Toolkit, for example, strongly advises including parenting students as members of task forces aimed at supporting members of the college community who have family responsibilities.
- 📍 Colleges could make job descriptions more inclusive and pursue diversity hiring goals to encourage current or former parenting students to fill student and college leadership positions.
- 📍 Parenting students could pursue more elected and career government positions, possibly bolstered by other leadership development efforts.

Mile Marker 8B: Collaborate to Build on Previous Efforts and Progress

Work on parenting student issues has been decentralized and at times more competitive than collaborative, causing many to believe they must start at square one for all projects. Agreeing on a shared agenda could help the field move forward more quickly and with greater effectiveness. This roadmap aims to provide a starting point in the process of developing a shared agenda for the field.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 An important part of agenda-setting is coming to a shared understanding of the population or issues. As described in mile marker 1A, defining key terms across colleges, organizations, agencies, and researchers will help ensure all stakeholders are part of the same discussion.
- 📍 Researchers, organizations, governments, and philanthropic funders could establish collaborative structures, such as the [Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge \(SPARK\) Collaborative](#) (see the Looking Forward section).
- 📍 Organizations and researchers could compile newsletters to share best practices among colleges to promote peer learning. State and federal governments could sponsor learning communities among colleges for specific purposes like CCAMPIS grants or for broader skill-sharing.
- 📍 Researchers, with funder support, could collate existing resources and insights into clearinghouses or databases that are easily accessible to a range of stakeholders.
- 📍 Current and former pregnant and parenting students could create a regional, state, or national networks to share experiences, insights, and ideas and to influence decisionmakers. Student-parent associations could also become affinity spaces to discuss issues, process experiences, and get support. Groups like these could be sponsored by colleges, philanthropy, government, and businesses.
- 📍 Anyone doing work in this area, even if they are a current or former parenting student themselves, would benefit from including, valuing, and responding to parenting students in meaningful ways throughout the process of developing and carrying out research, practice, policy, or investment. All materials relating to parenting students should be accessible to and shared with former and current pregnant and parenting students.

Mile Marker 8C: Create Supportive Entities

Few organizations explicitly focus on supporting student parents, though [Generation Hope](#) and other organizations mentioned in this report are notable exceptions. Given the size and diversity of the student-parent population, additional supportive organizations and other entities focused on different subpopulations or needs would almost certainly be beneficial for student-parent success.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Stakeholders interested in student-parent issues could establish new community-based organizations to support basic, legal, family, and academic needs. (As noted previously, constraining services to a narrow population that is variable over time, like “single motherhood,” can be undesirable,⁸³ but other subgroup focuses could be helpful to direct limited resources.) New advocacy organizations with parenting students in leadership positions could also help push action on various priority issues, especially if they can extend focus beyond traditional college settings to also emphasize adult education and workforce pathways.
- 📍 Researchers or funders could create partnerships with technology companies to process big data and analyze complex relationships and solutions across multidimensional systems.

Mile Marker 8D: Fund and Support Research to Inform Action

Throughout this roadmap, research has emerged repeatedly as an avenue to inform and advance policy and practice goals. Defining common language, using qualitative and participatory research methods, implementing new data collection strategies, and linking quantitative data across situational systems could all lead to better outcomes for student parents. But all of these strategies could be enhanced with a more structured, coordinated field of student-parent research.

For example, there is a marked lack of program evaluation in the field of student-parent programs and services, except for some aging welfare-to-work evaluations focused on single mothers eligible for TANF. Program evaluation could help develop and refine supportive models and share implementation strategies.

Suggested approaches and examples are below:

- 📍 Researchers could build evidence through mixed-methods program and policy evaluation, including student-parent-serving programs; campus child care services; special programs for safety net participants who are in school; guaranteed income, universal supports, and other

creative methods of supporting basic needs; public housing supports on or near college campuses; and infrastructural investments. Research could consider effects on student parents' financial resources, time, child well-being, and other near-term measures, in addition to longer-term outcomes. Research could also help analyze family-friendliness across postsecondary institutions, while also determining and refining the definition of a family-friendly campus.

- 📍 Research teams could combine insights from outcome and impact studies with research on the cost of various education pathways (and accumulated debt) to estimate return on investment for students and society, which emerged repeatedly as an information need in the field. Earnings thresholds and debt-to-earnings ratios could also be valuable reflections of program quality. Analyses should be disaggregated for different subgroups of parenting students and different types of postsecondary programs, with insights into what drives differences.
- 📍 More evidence about employers' return on investment when hiring student parents into family-sustaining careers, implementing family-friendly employment policies, and supporting employees' continued education and training would also be valuable.
- 📍 Researchers could establish pathways for current or former parenting students to become researchers and policy experts.
- 📍 More research on a range of educational settings and a range of student-parent subpopulations would help guard against overgeneralizing from a particular context or community.
- 📍 Research requires investments of financial resources, time, human capital, and partnership. Projects will be most informative if adequate resources are allocated to them, including for leadership and leadership development opportunities for student parents, collaborative discussions, and sharing of results with action-oriented stakeholders. Public investments from state and federal governments and nonpolitical philanthropies would help produce reliable, accurate, and actionable findings and insights. Ideally investments could be continuous rather than one-off and allow for a body of related research topics rather than constrained to a narrow scope. Broader funding could also attract more researchers to this area, building up the base of evidence upon which to base policy and practice changes.
- 📍 Few college institutional research offices investigate these topics besides Monroe Community College (DeMario 2021), which has produced one of the only sources of data on the effects of campus child care on students. These efforts could be expanded through directed grants from government or philanthropy.

- 📍 Researchers could share insights not only with other researchers, but with policymakers, administrators, practitioners, funders, and with student parents themselves. Regular communications like newsletters or a database of up-to-date information and analyses could be informative to the field. A promising strategy is to participate in or establish active collaborations among stakeholders.

Looking Forward

The value of centering student-parent families is crucial in understanding policies and systems in a range of family and postsecondary contexts. Student parents and their families have lived and studied expertise and usually have a high capacity to develop innovative but feasible solutions to the challenges they face. Throughout the Student-Parent Families at the Center project and in the development of this roadmap, members of the project team, Leadership Council, and other advisors and collaborators tried to embody this value.

The process of developing this roadmap highlighted major gaps in understanding in this field and opportunities. This motivated the development of a new SPARK Collaborative and a National Skills and Training through Action Research (N. STAR) Leadership Network of pregnant and parenting student fellows, leaders, and allies of this work. The SPARK Collaborative aims to build a national partnership coalition to develop bodies of data, research, and insight that inspire and inform meaningful action for pregnant and parenting students. Through the N. STAR Leadership Network, the SPARK Collaborative intends to elevate and center the experiences and roles of pregnant, parenting, and caregiving students through paid leadership-pathway fellowships that will amplify their contributions in all elements of collaborative, cross-organizational research, policy, and practice projects that advance equitable educational opportunity for pregnant and parenting students.

The hope is that this framework and roadmap have emphasized the gaps and the opportunities and that others will come together around student parents to collaboratively push forward a shared agenda for positive change.

Notes

- ¹ These statistics come from the 2012/2017 Beginning Postsecondary Students Survey. We obtained these data from the National Center for Education Statistics' DataLab tool available at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>.
- ² Much scholarship has been written about race, class, and gender in history of higher education. An accessible overview appears in "A History of Privilege in American Higher Education," *Best Colleges*, December 16, 2021, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/analysis/2020/07/17/history-privilege-higher-education/>.
- ³ US Department of Education, "Table 303.40. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Attendance Status, Sex, and Age of Student: Selected Years, 1970 through 2029," *Digest of Education Statistics*, June 2021, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_303.40.asp.
- ⁴ US Department of Education, "Table 331.20. Full-Time, First-Time Degree/Certificate-Seeking Undergraduate Students Enrolled in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Participation and Average Amount Awarded in Financial Aid Programs, and Control and Level of institution: 2000-01 through 2018-19," *Digest of Education Statistics*, September 2020, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_331.20.asp.
- ⁵ US Department of Education, "Table 306.10. Total Fall Enrollment in Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions, by Level of Enrollment, Sex, Attendance Status, and Race/Ethnicity or Nonresident Alien Status of Student: Selected Years, 1976 through 2019," *Digest of Education Statistics*, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_306.10.asp.
- ⁶ "Nearly a quarter" comes 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: Undergraduate. "Nearly a third" comes from 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: Graduate. We obtained these data from the National Center for Education Statistics' DataLab tool available at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>.
- ⁷ These statistics come from the 2012/2017 Beginning Postsecondary Students Survey. We obtained these data from the National Center for Education Statistics' DataLab tool available at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>.
- ⁸ Students raising children during college have been part of the landscape of higher education for a very long time, but the complexities of their academic engagement have been largely unrecognized and underexplored. The history of student-parents and the services available to them has not been well documented, and until recent years, few researchers, policymakers, practitioners, or funders had focused efforts or resources on this population.
- ⁹ More information about the terminology appears in Autumn Green, "Student Parents or Parenting Students? Why Terminology Matters," *Women Change Worlds* (blog), February 1, 2022, <https://www.wcwonline.org/WCW-Blog-Women-Change-Worlds/entry/Student-parents-or-parenting-students-why-terminology-matters>.
- ¹⁰ Not all students with caregiving responsibilities for children identify with, feel included by, or recognize themselves as reflected or represented by some terms. These names also have different meanings, even though they are often used interchangeably. Some of these names frame students with children as part of a larger student demographic that also includes other students who do not have children but are navigating similar or parallel roles and challenges as college students. For example, the term "student caregivers" or "student carers" as more commonly used internationally, includes all students with caretaking responsibilities, including those who care for loved ones who are elders or have disabilities, instead of or in addition to caring for children. Other names are more specific to certain identities or subgroups of students with children while excluding others. For example, student fathers both on the Leadership Council and in existing research have shared that they do not pursue opportunities that heavily emphasize student mothers, because they do not view these opportunities as also being for them.

¹¹ Accommodations and excused absences can be requested for all pregnancy-related issues including fertility planning, abortion services, prenatal appointments or morning sickness before or during early pregnancy, as well as postpartum issues, such as mental health challenges.

Many college administrators, including some Title IX coordinators, have misunderstood their requirements and responsibilities pertaining to student pregnancy as limited only to birth and postpartum leave, which the Department of Education clarified in the updated guidance.

¹² “Elevate Data for Equity,” Urban Institute, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.urban.org/invest-data-capacity/stories-field/advocacy-and-policy-change-data>.

¹³ For example, noncredit students, students in short-term programs, undocumented immigrants, international students, students who attend college through an employer, those sponsored by Veteran’s Administration military benefits, and others who are or believe themselves to be ineligible for aid, are not aware of or do not know how to file the FAFSA, or otherwise do not apply for aid for other reasons.

¹⁴ See also “NASFAA Deep Dive: Changes to Federal Methodology, Other Student Aid Changes From Spending Bill,” *National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators*, December 21, 2020, https://www.nasfaa.org/news-item/24269/NASFAA_Deep-Dive_Changes_to_Federal_Methodology_Other_Student_Aid_Changes_From_Spending_Bill

¹⁵ S. B. 564, 81st Oregon Legislative Assembly (2021). <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Measures/Overview/SB564>.

Pub. A. 102-0088, S. B. 0267, Illinois General Assembly (2021). <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/publicacts/fulltext.asp?Name=102-0088>.

¹⁶ Drawing from parallel critiques made by activists for people who have disabilities, some student-parents have expressed that sensationalizing their successes as heroic because of their backgrounds and parental identities can be counterproductive and problematic. Framing student-parents’ successes through exceptionalism can both reinforce deficit-frames applied in parallel to other parenting students who struggle and encounter setbacks and can be used to rationalize inadequate investment and support for students with children, by reinforcing the assumption that very few students with children will attain their goals. These frames may also overemphasize individual student accomplishments and “grit,” while overlooking the need for structural and systems change that could help reduce inequities more broadly. Most parenting students would prefer to be treated and portrayed as “normal college students”: competent, capable, and deserving of equity and support to complete education. Mindfulness of these issues and how qualitative research might impact them can thus be important in considering how data is framed, presented, and discussed.

¹⁷ Strong funding and policymaking emphasis has been placed on single-parent students, and more specifically single-mother students. But many student-parents have complicated romantic, partnership, and coparenting relationships that are not reflected by their legal marital status. Misalignments between partnership status and coparenting relationships can create confusion for some parents about whether they are “single parents” or not. For example, some students with children who are not married live and coparent with a partner. Some students may stay legally married to people who are no longer their partners. And some parents marry another person after ending relationships with their children’s other parent, but do not see their new marital partners as coparenting partners and may not expect them to establish parental relationships with their children. But in other families, stepparents serve as critical coparenting partners. In addition, student-parents who relocate to attend school may temporarily leave their partners but remain in long-distance relationships and bring their children with them, spending most of their time in college solo parenting. And it is very common for student-parents to effectively coparent with their own parent, creating intergenerational coparenting families.

- ¹⁸ “Bill Creates Funding for Benefit Navigators at all Oregon Public Community Colleges and Universities,” *National Skills Coalition*, July 16, 2021, <https://nationalskillscoalition.org/news/press-releases/bill-creates-funding-for-benefit-navigators-at-all-oregon-public-community-colleges-and-universities/>.
- ¹⁹ “8 Keys to Veterans’ Success Sites,” US Department of Education, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.ed.gov/veterans-and-military-families/8-keys-success-sites>.
- ²⁰ Joseph Shapiro, “France’s Model Health Care for New Mothers,” *NPR*, July 10, 2008, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92116914>.
- ²¹ “Aspen Institute Announces Policy Acceleration Partnerships,” *Minnesota Office of Higher Education*, March 25, 2021, <https://www.ohe.state.mn.us/mPg.cfm?pageID=2438>.
- ²² “Work Support Strategies,” Urban Institute, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.urban.org/work-support-strategies>.
- ²³ “SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot,” Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture, last updated August 4, 2022, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot>.
- ²⁴ Some states already disregard all forms of Title IV student aid, but the practice is not universal and may require policy change or additional training for benefit workers. Hawaii excludes income from the work option in their Bridge to Hope program for TANF recipients from benefit calculations. Parents as Scholars and the HOPE Program, both in Maine, and Project SPARC in California also use TANF funds to support student-parents without additional work requirements.
- ²⁵ [Double Up America’s Food Bucks Program](#) gives families twice the purchasing power by doubling the value of SNAP benefits when used to purchase farm fresh produce and local food items through CSA distributions or farmer’s markets. But the limit on the portion of monthly benefits that are eligible for this match is a relatively constrained (varying from \$10 to \$30 per market or per month). If the caps for this match were increased—potentially up to the full monthly benefit for each household—families could increase their purchasing power for healthy produce and local foods. The Portland Farmer’s Market participates in Double Bucks for customers paying with SNAP Benefits, offering a \$10 match for produce purchases at the Saturday Farmer’s Market (see Heather Morrill, “SNAP Match Program Expands,” *Portland Farmers Market*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.portlandfarmersmarket.org/snap-match-program-expands/>). The [Love Farm’s CSA](#) farm share program also offers a one-to-one match to members using SNAP benefits.
- ²⁶ A. B. No. 2881, California Legislative Counsel (2021–22). https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220AB2881.
- ²⁷ “Tuition & Fees,” Office of the Registrar, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://registrar.berkeley.edu/tuition-fees-residency/tuition-fees/>.
- ²⁸ The child welfare system in particular can be complex, especially when it intersects with tribal governments.
- ²⁹ For example, see Elissa Nadworny, “Colleges Could Do More to Help Student Parents Pay for Child Care, Watchdog Says,” *NPR*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/12/759949879/colleges-could-do-more-to-help-student-parents-pay-for-child-care-watchdog-says>.
- ³⁰ This might include cost of attendance determinations, how social assistance interacts with aid, appeals, regaining eligibility, and other key concepts.
- ³¹ Barbara O’Neill, “Cultural Differences in Handling Credit,” *Cooperative Extension* (blog), May 30, 2019, <https://personal-finance.extension.org/cultural-differences-in-handling-credit/>.
- ³² “Students With Dependent Children,” California Student Aid Commission, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.csac.ca.gov/students-dependents>.

- ³³ See Autumn Green, “Paying for College as a Student Parent Is...Complicated,” *Women Change Worlds* (blog), September 13, 2019, <https://www.wcwwonline.org/WCW-Blog-Women-Change-Worlds/Paying-for-college-as-a-student-parent-is-complicated>.
- ³⁴ “Fact Sheet: Interaction of Pell Grants and Tax Credits: Students May Be Foregoing Tax Benefits by Mistake,” Internal Revenue Service, US Department of Treasury, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/Pell%20AOTC%204%20pager.pdf>.
- ³⁵ “Countries with Free College 2022,” World Population View, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-free-college>.
- ³⁶ “Fostering Independence Higher Education Grants,” Minnesota Office of Higher Education, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.ohe.state.mn.us/mPg.cfm?pageID=2491>.
- ³⁷ The statistics in this paragraph come from 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: Graduate. We obtained these data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ DataLab tool available at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab/>.
- ³⁸ See “The Limited PSLF Waiver Opportunity Ended on Oct. 31, 2022,” Federal Student Aid, accessed December 8, 2022, <https://studentaid.gov/announcements-events/pslf-limited-waiver>.
- ³⁹ Saul McLeod, “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs,” *Simply Psychology*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/maslow.html>.
- ⁴⁰ In addition to the issues raised in endnote 17, partnership relationships also change—sometimes unexpectedly, and often very quickly, while policies and systems that serve student-parent families can be slow to respond effectively to changing family relationships, dynamics, or compositions. When relationship status is linked to qualification for supportive programs, benefits, or services, relationship changes may create challenging conundrums for staff who must determine whether and how relationship changes will impact a student-parent’s continuing eligibility. Parents may also feel externally constrained about developing relationships with potential partners or disclosing their partnerships for fear that doing so could lead them to lose essential supports.
- ⁴¹ Rakshitha Arni Ravishankar, “It’s Time to Officially End Unpaid Internships,” *Harvard Business Review*, May 26, 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/05/its-time-to-officially-end-unpaid-internships>.
- ⁴² Prior efforts to make the EITC available as an advanced payment experienced low participation rates, which many conclude meant the program was unpopular. However, research suggests that periodic payments may be appropriate and useful (Maag, Congdon, and Yau 2021).
- ⁴³ “Restaurant Meals Program,” Food and Nutrition Service, US Department of Agriculture, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/restaurant-meals-program>.
- ⁴⁴ Kelly Field, “College, With Kids: As More Students with Young Children Enroll, Colleges Find Ways to Help Them Succeed,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 16, 2017, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/college-with-kids/>.
- ⁴⁵ Some work has been completed on related topics, including Goldrick-Rab, Welton, and Coca (2020); Meier et al. (2021); and Sallee et al. (2022).
- ⁴⁶ Most campus family housing stock built in the mid-20th century was supported with funding provided by the Lanham Act to support student veterans with families (Tanner 2017).
- ⁴⁷ As of 2019, the [Campus Family Housing Database Study](#) found that only 254 US higher education institutions (6 percent) offered a student housing option that allowed students to live in residence with children. At that time, researchers identified 28 campus family housing programs that had closed in the past five years, although closures have since continued. Most campus family housing programs are located in apartment complexes at the edge of campus or in nearby neighborhoods, although a handful of colleges offer family housing programs in

adapted residence halls. See also Rebecca Kelliher, “As Number of Student Parents Rises, So Does Need for Family Friendly Housing on Campus,” *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, October 6, 2021, <https://www.diverseeducation.com/home/article/15279531/as-number-of-student-parents-rises-so-does-need-for-family-friendly-housing-on-campus>.

- ⁴⁸ Jack Long and Sarah Szilagy, “With Ohio State’s Demolition of Buckeye Village Comes Increased Rent, Few Choices for Students with Children,” *The Lantern*, June 30, 2021, <https://www.thelantern.com/projects/2021/06/30/with-ohio-states-demolition-of-buckeye-village-comes-increased-rent-few-choices-for-students-with-children/>.
- ⁴⁹ Buckner Family Pathways provides on-campus apartments, child care, and family services through a partnership between the college and a nonprofit family services provider. See “Family Pathways: 20 Years of a Perfect Partnership,” *Buckner International* (blog), accessed December 8, 2022, <https://www.buckner.org/buckner-family-pathways-blog/family-pathways-20-years-of-a-perfect-partnership/>.
- ⁵⁰ **Family Scholar House** is a community-based organization serving single-parent student families leverages affordable housing tax credits and Section 8 eligibility to provide off-campus housing at community-based program sites.
- ⁵¹ The **Jeremiah Program** builds supportive housing for single-mother students at their residential program sites.
- ⁵² **Columbus Scholar House** reflects a partnership between Community Properties of Ohio, Ohio State University, Columbus State Community College, YMCA of Central Ohio, Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority, Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing, and the Affordable Housing Trust of Columbus and Franklin County. Residents of Columbus Scholar House are considered “at-risk” student-parents who would otherwise face barriers to completing degrees. They live in newly renovated affordable subsidized apartments featuring upgraded features and appliances. Residents also have access to child care and supportive services staffed by the **Ohio State University’s Access Collaborative** program for parenting students.
- ⁵³ **Tierney Learning Center** offers a broad range of educational opportunities for community residents, including Head Start, after school enrichment programs, high school equivalency preparation, computer skills classes, English language courses, and workforce and higher education pathway programs.
- ⁵⁴ **Julie’s Family Learning Center** is a two-generation program offering early childhood education and adult basic education and precollege pathway programs for parents of enrolled children is located conveniently to serve families in two nearby public housing developments.
- ⁵⁵ EMPath’s flagship **Mobility Mentoring Program, Career Family Opportunities**, was initially developed through a five-year demonstration project supporting mobility pathways for parent participants living in subsidized units from the Boston Housing Authority. The CFO model has since been adopted as a US Department of Housing and Urban Development-supported Moving to Work Initiative by the Cambridge Housing Authority with 40 resident families pursuing mobility pathways (Cambridge Housing Authority 2015).
- ⁵⁶ Ed Dolan, “What’s Wrong with Employer Sponsored Health Insurance,” *Niskanen Center*, November 6, 2018, <https://www.niskanencenter.org/whats-wrong-with-employer-sponsored-health-insurance/>.
- ⁵⁷ Parenting students have reported that negative interactions with campus health providers, including being accused of taking up too much time or too many resources, can deter them from returning for follow-up care.
- ⁵⁸ Generation Hope’s 2020 Student Survey found that only 27 percent of parenting student survey respondents indicated that they “feel comfortable accessing mental health services on campus for [themselves and their children], with appointment times that meet [their] scheduling needs,” while 32 percent disagreed with this statement (Lewis and Haynes 2020). However, survey participants identifying as Black, Hispanic, and with other non-White racial and ethnic identities were much less likely to agree with this statement. Campus-based services that intentionally work to help parenting students—especially student-parents of color—feel safe,

welcomed, comfortable, and supported in ways that align with their lives could provide critical support for their mental health and well-being (Ascend at the Aspen Institute and the JED Foundation 2021).

- ⁵⁹ Many school districts offer free or reduced fare for students in public schools, but these are often not coordinated with adult transit passes (offered through colleges, to participants in public assistance programs or adults with disabilities) to serve families relying on public transportation together.
- ⁶⁰ “Community & Technical Colleges Transit Map,” Civic Mapping Initiative, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.civicmaps.org/community-technical-college-transit-map>.
- ⁶¹ Some colleges reserve specified parking spaces for pregnant and parenting students. Reserved parking spaces near locations that student-parents and their families frequent (such as student housing, child care centers, dining halls, and student services buildings) can reduce time pressure and stress on parents and support healthy pregnancies.
- ⁶² Single parents, student families with young children or family members with disabilities, and those who live in rural areas often have greater barriers to using alternate transit options and rely more heavily on private vehicles to meet their daily transportation needs.
- ⁶³ At Endicott College, the 10 parking spaces located directly outside the Keys to Degrees single-parent student housing were reserved for the families in the program—all of whom had young children and often also were carrying groceries, laundry, or other family care items difficult to transport by foot across campus. Because these parking spaces were in a location central to campus and there was otherwise steep competition for parking spaces, some nonparent students expressed frustration and resentment about this accommodation.
- ⁶⁴ See Abigail Seldin, “Students should be allowed to buy cars with financial aid,” *The Hill*, May 20, 2021, <https://thehill.com/opinion/education/554626-students-should-be-allowed-to-buy-cars-with-financial-aid/>.
- ⁶⁵ [The Lifeline Program](#) is an FCC-supported program, funded through the Universal Service Fund, which provides no or low-cost mobile voice and data plans, broadband only service (mobile or in-home) or landline home phone service plans. For participating low-income families, Lifeline can function as a service plan discount credited against monthly billing charges, or as an entirely cost-free service plan. Households living on approved tribal lands can receive an additional monthly service credit. Eligible telecommunication’s carriers (ETCs) must apply and receive approval from a designated state agency or the FCC to become a Lifeline ETC community-based organization.

Lifeline has provided discounted telephone service for low-income families for almost 40 years and has expand in response to technological advances. But Lifeline’s reimbursement rates have remained stagnant or decreased, even as the FCC has substantially expanded minimum service coverage requirements. Because the FCC has increased minimum coverage requirements for Lifeline service plans without increasing provider reimbursement rates, many Lifeline ETCs have stopped offering free mobile devices to new Lifeline customers. But most Lifeline service providers offer SIM cards that can be used in any carrier-unlocked cell phone, allowing new customers to bring their own device when transitioning to a Lifeline community-based organization.

Lifeline service plans only allows one mobile, landline, or broadband service account per household and only one line per account. The FCC has recently adjusted this definition to extend service to customer households that share an address with other households. See “What is a Household?” USAC Lifeline Support, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/what-is-a-household/>.

- ⁶⁶ See endnote 65.
- ⁶⁷ The [ACP](#) is an FCC benefit program that was recently implemented to replace the [Emergency Broadband Benefit](#) (created as a temporary program during the COVID-19 pandemic) with a permanent initiative providing affordable high-speed broadband service, as a fixture of federal communications infrastructure. ACP provides a monthly service plan credit for broadband internet service plans through eligible community-based organizations; households living on eligible tribal lands can receive a larger monthly service plan credit. Like

Lifeline, the ACP's subsidized broadband service is restricted to one monthly broadband service credit per household, which may be linked to mobile broadband service on a single device (such as a tablet, laptop or desktop computer). The ACP credit might cover the full cost of broadband service, or can be applied as a credit toward a higher priced monthly broadband service plan.

- ⁶⁸ Comcast launched [Internet Essentials](#) to help low-income children attending public schools access high-speed internet to complete their homework. Internet Essentials is a low-cost high-speed internet service plan, which is available to income-eligible households for a low monthly fee and includes a wireless router. All low-income households are now eligible.
- ⁶⁹ "Communications Workers of America and Microsoft launch 'Get Connected' initiative to boost Affordable Connectivity Program enrollment," *Microsoft News Center*, September 1, 2021: <https://news.microsoft.com/2022/09/01/communications-workers-of-america-and-microsoft-launch-get-connected-initiative-to-boost-affordable-connectivity-program-enrollment/>.
- ⁷⁰ See "Cost of Attendance (Budget) | 2022–2023 Federal Student Aid Handbook," Federal Student Aid, US Department of Education, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://fsapartners.ed.gov/knowledge-center/fsa-handbook/2022-2023/vol3/ch2-cost-attendance-budget>.
- ⁷¹ Listed priority groups include low-income households, veterans, families who include members with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and rural residents.
- ⁷² Amjab Ayoubi, "The Tremendous Benefits of connecting Academic and Career Advising," *The Career Leadership Collective*, January 23, 2017: <https://www.careerleadershipcollective.com/post/2017/01/06/the-tremendous-benefits-of-connecting-academic-and-career-advising>.
- ⁷³ Michelle Maitre, "Starting early on college and career," *EdSource*, February 25, 2015, <https://edsources.org/2015/starting-early-on-college-and-career/75316>
- ⁷⁴ Sarah Jane Glynn and Diana Boesch, "Connecting the Dots: 'Women's Work' and the Wage Gap," *US Department of Labor Blog* (blog), March 14, 2022, <https://blog.dol.gov/2022/03/15/connecting-the-dots-womens-work-and-the-wage-gap>.
- ⁷⁵ "State Family and Medical Leave Laws," National Conference on State Legislatures, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/state-family-and-medical-leave-laws.aspx>.
- ⁷⁶ Alexis Gravely, "Washington Watch: Apply for CCAMPIS grants," *Community College Daily*, June 8, 2022, <https://www.ccdaily.com/2022/06/washington-watch-apply-for-ccampis-grants/>.
- ⁷⁷ "Bridging the Gap," Urban Institute, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/building-americas-workforce/projects/bridging-gap>.
- ⁷⁸ Some colleges charge campus child care centers for rent and facility maintenance, while others provide those services in kind.
- ⁷⁹ Gina Adams and Linda Giannarelli, "What Happens If We Make Child Care Assistance Available to More Parents in Education and Training?" *WorkRise Network* (blog), Urban Institute, March 15, 2022, <https://www.workrisenetwork.org/working-knowledge/what-happens-if-we-make-child-care-assistance-available-more-parents-education>.
- ⁸⁰ Gina Adams, Peter Willenborg, Cary Lou, and Diane Schilder, "To Make the Child Care System More Equitable, Expand Options for Parents Working Nontraditional Hours," *Urban Wire* (blog), January 14, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/make-child-care-system-more-equitable-expand-options-parents-working-nontraditional-hours>.

⁸¹ “Higher Education Expenditures,” Urban Institute, accessed December 13, 2022, <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/state-and-local-finance-initiative/state-and-local-backgrounders/higher-education-expenditures>.

⁸² It may be useful to remind others that staff working on such committees are typically compensated as part of their employment hours, while students serving in parallel leadership roles are not automatically compensated. Voluntary leadership roles may pose a significant barrier for student-parents, who often experience time poverty, and may need to prioritize paid opportunities to support their families and educational costs. In addition to paid student employment or stipends, some parenting students may find in-kind compensation for their efforts, such as waivers for on-campus costs such as tuition, meals, parking permits, or family housing, equally or even more beneficial as cash wages. It might be possible for colleges to offer these forms of compensation to student leaders with minimal if any direct cost.

⁸³ See discussion in endnote 17.

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About the Authors

Theresa Anderson is a principal research associate at the Urban Institute. She is a member of the Building America's Workforce cross-center initiative in the Income and Benefits Policy Center and is affiliated with the Center on Education Data and Policy. She leads teams in conducting in-depth, mixed-methods research on evaluations of workforce, education, and social safety net programs and policies. She is particularly interested in improving access to and success in education throughout the life course, from early childhood to adulthood. Her work has focused on student parents, low-income families, opportunity youth, adult education students, underprepared college students, high school students from historically underserved populations, and public housing residents.

Dr. Anderson received a BA from Hampshire College in Massachusetts and an MPP and a PhD in public policy and public administration, with a concentration in program evaluation, both from the George Washington University.

Autumn Green is a non-resident fellow at the Urban Institute who has been formally engaged in research, evaluation, implementation, and policy and systems change efforts for the past two decades. Across her career, Dr. Green has focused on supporting low-income families and communities and advancing educational equity for marginalized student populations. She has earned national recognition as a pivotal leader in research, policy, and practice promoting postsecondary success for parenting students, serving as an advisor to multiple campus and national policy and program initiatives.

Dr. Green was originally trained as a sociologist with specialized concentrations in poverty, family, and social policy; intersectionality; and social research methods. She earned her BS, MA, and PhD in Sociology, while simultaneously completing numerous applied research and field experiences in related disciplines, including Policy Studies and Social Psychology, and conducting original research documenting student mothers' experiences in higher education through qualitative and community-engaged research methods. After completing a terminal degree in sociology, Dr. Green worked in close partnership with the Program Evaluation & Research Group through which she expanded her skills and training in program evaluation, while also completing a second master's degree in Education.

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