Family-Friendly Campuses

Student-Parent Families at the Center

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Family-friendly learning environments can support diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education and promote feelings of safety and comfort for students with children. In 2019, more than one-fifth of student-parent survey respondents said they felt unsafe or uncomfortable sharing their parental identities with their peers or professors, with more than one in four Black and Latinx student-parents expressing the same sentiments (https://urbn.is/3Er2QZC).

Leadership Council members and recent publications have emphasized the importance of promoting supportive and inclusive campus cultures for pregnant and parenting students, as feelings of safety and comfort lead to better student mental health and well-being and increases in retention and degree attainment (https://urbn.is/3DCjw03, https://urbn.is/3ZnS26G).

WHAT ARE FAMILY-FRIENDLY CAMPUSES?

Colleges with institutional cultures, programs, policies, and structures that are intentionally inclusive and supportive of students who are pregnant and parenting are considered “family-friendly campuses.” Support strategies offer resources to everyone on campus who is parenting, including faculty, staff, and students (https://urbn.is/3ZyBWXW).

Components of family-friendly campuses, as defined in the Find Your Way Collaborative Research Project (https://urbn.is/3Qwx7KN) include the following:

- Family housing options within student housing programs (https://urbn.is/3QAUG4X)
- On-campus or college-affiliated child care programs (https://urbn.is/3CHCD7J)
- Scholarship programs that target or prioritize parenting students (https://urbn.is/3GEBoHo)
- Student-parent-specific programs and resource centers (https://urbn.is/3ZuBXMu)
- Programs such as women’s centers, work/life offices, nontraditional student programs, and basic needs security initiatives that are likely to serve pregnant and parenting students

Other best practices, as highlighted by the Wisconsin Technical College System and others, may include student health insurance policies that offer an affordable family-level coverage option, student health and counseling providers who are trained to understand and work with students facing complex challenges and family issues, and priority enrollment or access to services for pregnant and parenting students (https://urbn.is/3CH9cTb). An increased focus on family friendliness in outreach and recruitment, as well as in financial aid, student activities, and classroom policies, can also lead

More than one-third of student-parents surveyed in 2019 had not observed any family-friendly campus components at their colleges. Among students of color, 45 percent reported no family-friendly components.

Only 6 percent of US colleges offered campus family housing (https://urbn.is/3ZuSn7G). Twenty-eight colleges ended their family housing programs between 2014 and 2019.

Across 23 states, about one-third of colleges offered campus child care. Only 16 percent of colleges offered specialized programs or services for student-parents and only 18 percent offered scholarships for student-parents.
to more inclusive campuses. Some institutions, such as Kent State, have established family-friendly campus taskforces, coalitions, or advisory boards to review family friendliness at their campuses (https://urbn.is/3ZxxqJq).

Other colleges have redefined “family friendly,” targeting support to college employees rather than students or restricting support to instructional staff (https://urbn.is/3iyPcLC, https://urbn.is/3Zq7I9L). To distinguish from these restrictive definitions, some colleges use the phrase “student-parent supportive” (https://urbn.is/3kbdKea). Meanwhile, “kid friendly” campuses work to consciously establish and sustain campus cultures and spaces where children are welcomed and valued as members of the college community.

THE FAMILY FRIENDLY CAMPUS TOOLKIT

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit offers a set of tools intended to support colleges and universities through a self-guided process of assessing and strengthening family friendliness toward students (https://urbn.is/3tAJlqY). Developed and published as a free, open-source resource by PERG Learning (originally at Endicott College), the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit draws from a study of baccalaureate student parent programs and insights from a dissertation study (https://urbn.is/3GYU2eB, https://urbn.is/3hPwMFx).

Institutions begin by forming a taskforce with campus-wide representation (including currently enrolled student-parents); collectively assess their progress toward potential best practices; conduct needs assessment studies with institutional data, student surveys, and focus groups; and finally develop, implement, and evaluate the success of an institutional action plan. Colleges can undertake this process iteratively, introducing reforms gradually or as part of a broader effort.

Other programs have used the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit to support student-parent work with colleges, such as the National College Transition Network’s College Success for Single Mothers college coaching and technical assistance initiative (https://urbn.is/3Qz6ipa), Generation Hope’s FamilyU Technical Assistance Program (https://urbn.is/3ZprAd3, which also published a list of suggested implementation practices: https://urbn.is/3GDvnur), Ascend at the Aspen Institute’s Postsecondary Leadership Circle for Parents (https://urbn.is/3GZ3NJy), and Ascend’s Black and Native Family Futures Fund (https://urbn.is/3kbXt8P).

BENEFITS OF FAMILY FRIENDLY CAMPUS INITIATIVES

Family-friendly campuses not only provide direct support for students with children but also promote inclusion, belonging, and academic success. Student-parents are disproportionately represented among Black and Indigenous students (including students identifying as American Indians/Alaskan Natives and Native Hawaiians/Pacific Islanders), Pell-eligible students, and first-generation college students. Although each of these groups are already prioritized in college support systems, efforts to promote, sustain, and expand family friendly campus cultures and practices could lead to a more diverse campus community and increased student success.

The family-friendly campus taskforce at El Paso Community College, for example, learned that more than half of their students were caring for children but almost none knew another student on campus with kids. As part of their action plan, they began by creating community spaces on each campus where parenting students could find resources and each other. By promoting family-friendly and student-parent-supportive campus cultures, colleges are also more likely to competitively recruit and retain pregnant and parenting students, bolstering their enrollment, retention, and graduation rates and overall assessment scores, in addition to creating more welcoming campuses.