



How Should Colleges Collect Parenting Student Data? (Version 2.0)

An Updated Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners

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Summary of Recommendations

- We recommend defining parenting students as follows: “A parenting student is someone who is enrolled in any level of education or training and is concurrently responsible for (or imminently will be responsible for) providing for a child of any age. They may be a biological parent, stepparent or unmarried coparent, adoptive parent, foster parent, guardian, grandparent, extended family member, or sibling caregiver.”
- We present a two-question and a one-question approach to asking students about their parenting status, with an optional supplemental question to identify single parents.
- We recommend that colleges begin by collecting students’ parenting status at initial application or enrollment.
- Colleges should update data from application or enrollment at least annually at universal student touchpoints, such as at course registration intake or through an enrollment form.
- Although surveys have some appealing benefits, we do not recommend that colleges use surveys as the primary method of collecting student parenting status.
- We do not recommend relying on external financial aid data.
- We also recommend avoiding manual data entry where possible.
- Colleges should also consider how to store data, minimize threats to students, engage students, inform students, reach out to faculty, and protect sensitive information.
- We summarize known challenges and present illustrative real-world examples of how colleges have approached data collection on students’ parenting status.

Background

Nationally, students who are parents (known as parenting students or student parents) make up nearly 1 in 5 undergraduates (Anderson et al. 2024). Though they earn similar grades to non-parenting students on average, student parents are much less likely to complete college credentials, even when controlling for personal characteristics and institution type (Anderson et al. 2024; Hicks and Anderson 2024). There is a growing state-level policy movement to require colleges to track students' parenting status to understand their outcomes and to design policies and practices that promote their success. This brief compiles insights from the Data-to-Action (D2A) Campaign for Parenting Students (box 1) and provides improved recommendations for how colleges can collect parenting status data, building on an earlier version of this work with new insights (see Sick and Anderson 2024). This brief recommends how to ask about parenting status, how to collect data, important considerations, known challenges, and real-world examples of colleges' approaches to data collection and usage. This brief emphasizes the technical aspects of gathering quality data, but such data should always be used to support student success—see the D2A project page¹ for resources on how to do so.

BOX 1

The Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students

[The Data-to-Action \(D2A\) Campaign for Parenting Students](#) is an effort in California, Illinois, and Oregon that aims to inform high-quality data collection on college students' parenting status and to use the data to improve opportunities for student parents to meet their education, career, and life goals. Through coaching, technical assistance, and peer learning, the D2A Campaign supports a college community of practice comprising higher education institutions in California, Illinois, and Oregon. In 2022 and 2023, these states took the lead in passing legislation to collect college students' parenting status at the student-record level, with the goal of improving higher education outcomes. In the D2A effort, the Urban Institute is leading a collaboration of motivated colleges, parenting students, two advisory boards, and consultant partners. This team is collaborating to develop new best practices and strategies for responsibly collecting student parent data in a way that sets a positive example for other related efforts. The D2A team promotes these insights to various stakeholders, allowing more colleges, states, and federal agencies to use data to support the success of parenting students, who make up about one in five undergraduate and one in four graduate students.

How to Define Parenting Status

“Parenting” can take many forms. We suggest adopting the following inclusive definition of a parenting student, or student parent:

A parenting student is someone who is enrolled in any level of education or training and is concurrently responsible for (or imminently will be responsible for) providing for a child of any age. They may be a biological parent, stepparent or unmarried coparent, adoptive parent, foster parent, guardian, grandparent, extended family member, or sibling caregiver.

We believe this definition maximizes inclusion and flexibility. It does not depend on the amount of time a person cares for a child; the legal or dependent status of a person’s child; whether the parent and child always live in the same household; or whether the child is a legal minor (under age 18). These are restrictions found in some other definitions (Sick et al. 2023).

How to Ask about Parenting Status

Some states specify the wording colleges should use to identify parenting students. If colleges have discretion, or if states are considering new guidance, we recommend the following questions sets, which include questions on the number and age of children.² With any questions asked, it is important that colleges have a planned use for the data so that only relevant information is collected and students are not burdened providing answers that will not inform policy or practice. See the “College Examples” section for real-world instances of how colleges have used these data to support parenting students.

Two-Question Approach

Colleges can determine pregnancy or expectancy status (to identify expectant non-birthing parents), parenting status, the number of children, and the ages of children through the following two questions:

- 1) **Check as many of the following categories as apply to you:** *[Check boxes or yes/no fields]*
 - I am currently parenting at least one child
 - I am currently pregnant
 - I am not pregnant but am expecting to become a parent in the next nine months
 - I am not currently parenting, pregnant, or expectant *[Note: should be exclusive so no other response can be selected]*
 - Prefer not to say *[Note: should be exclusive so no other response can be selected]*

If the student indicates “I am currently parenting at least one child” in the first question, then the college should display this second question (the age ranges can be adjusted if needed):

2) For each of the following categories, indicate the number of children you are parenting:

[Numerical fields]

 Children ages 0 to 2

 Children ages 3 to 5

 Children ages 6 to 12

 Children ages 13 to 17

 Children ages 18 or older

Sometimes colleges want a count of children but cannot or prefer not to ask about each child age category, in which case they should instead display this second question:

2) How many children are you currently parenting? *[Numerical field]*

This question could be contingent on whether child age information is useful to tailoring supports. For example, responses could include “under age 18,” “under age 13,” or “under age 6.”

One-Question Approach

In some cases, a college may only be able to ask one question. The following one-question approach keeps the scope of information but omits a count of children:

1) Check as many of the following categories as apply to you:

I am parenting a child or children ages 0 to 2

I am parenting a child or children ages 3 to 5

I am parenting a child or children ages 6 to 12

I am parenting a child or children ages 13 to 17

I am parenting a child or children ages 18 or older

I am currently pregnant

I am not pregnant but am expecting to become a parent in the next nine months

I am not currently parenting, pregnant, or expectant *[Note: should be exclusive so no other response can be selected]*

Prefer not to say *[Note: should be exclusive so no other response can be selected]*

Only a lower-bound of the number of children can be determined through this question. The above example has many options but also captures many statuses. Colleges can simplify the option set, with the caveat that every student respondent should feel that one option appropriately represents them.

Supplemental Question on Single Parenting

It might also be desirable to identify single parents, which can be determined with one supplemental question. Given the complicated and fluid nature of relationship or partnership status, we recommend allowing single or solo parents³ to self-identify their status:

Are you currently a single parent to any of the children you are parenting?

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

Important Note on Pregnancy and Expecting Questions

States and colleges should consider whether pregnancy is a relevant condition to track in the data. On the one hand, pregnant students have explicit protections under federal Title IX regulations.⁴ On the other, state policies on reproductive decisionmaking may make tracking pregnancy status particularly sensitive, and colleges may choose not to collect those data.

We have also included in these suggested questions a place to identify non-birthing expectant parents, including fathers and people who will become parents through adoption, fostering, a partner, or another way. Identifying these students is only recommended if the college uses the data to proactively connect students with preparatory support and guidance.

How to Collect Data

Students' parenting status and related statuses (e.g., single parent status, age of children, number of children, etc.) can change. To give parenting students a chance to self-identify throughout their education, data should be collected at least annually.⁵ However, more frequent collection could be beneficial to help conduct outreach, target resources, or offer priority course registration each term, which is an increasingly popular accommodation.

Colleges have several touchpoints where they can ask for parenting status. We reviewed the pros and cons of each in Sick and Anderson (2024):

- application or initial enrollment to the college
- course registration each term
- periodic online nudges or notifications
- surveys
- external databases
- manual flagging (staff flagging students one at a time as they learn about their status).

Since that initial publication, we have refined the pros and cons which are now framed as specific recommendations below, with some of the above touchpoints not recommended at all.

We recommend that colleges begin by collecting students' parenting status at initial application or enrollment, which should be recorded in or transferred to the student's record once they matriculate. Some system-level applications now include parenting status questions, including the nationwide Common Application,⁶ Cal State Apply for the California State University System,⁷ CCCApply for California community colleges,⁸ ApplyTexas for public colleges and universities across Texas,⁹ and the City Colleges of Chicago central application for all seven Chicago community colleges.¹⁰

Colleges should update data from application or enrollment at least annually at universal student touchpoints, such as a course registration intake or through an enrollment form. Such forms are used by many colleges and may be required of students at the point of course registration or as a mandatory questionnaire before registration (see "College Examples" section below for descriptions of real-world usage of such forms). Colleges typically host these forms on their online student platform—often a student information system (SIS) or learning management system (LMS).¹¹ If registration intake forms are not feasible, then we recommend nudges to collect parenting status. A nudge is a web-based periodic notification or pop-up that prompts students to electronically update or submit new information. If nudges are used, we recommend they be deployed at student SIS/LMS login and be triggered early in each academic term. They should be persistent, meaning they appear repeatedly until a student responds, even if that response is "prefer not to say."

Although surveys have some appealing benefits, **we do not recommend that colleges use surveys as the primary method of collecting student parenting status**. Surveys may require high levels of staff effort and may result in low response rates (often under 10 percent!), survey fatigue, and biased data. For colleges in a transition period, well-designed surveys can temporarily fill a data collection gap. Surveys are best used to collect important supplemental information, such as student perceptions and preferences, among students identified as parenting through another data collection method.

We do not recommend relying on external financial aid data because the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is no longer a useful source of information on parenting status.¹² Other external data sources are also flawed, as they are not representative of any one college and may vary due to governmental administrative procedure or rule changes. We recommend that public data only be relied on to supplement a college's own data collection, such as to gauge the share of parenting students they might expect from state-level data for their institution type (e.g., community colleges in Oregon).

We also recommend avoiding manual data entry where possible. Manual quality control might occasionally be necessary, but *ad hoc* identification of parenting status is unlikely to achieve sufficient coverage and is unsustainable due to the effort required. Manual data entry could also result in privacy risks if students do not understand that disclosing their parenting status to a staff member (e.g., an academic advisor) could prompt a change to their student record.

In summary, we recommend a layered approach, where colleges use a combination of an initial student census (or near-census) collected at application or enrollment, along with registration touchpoints or on-login nudges to collect parenting status. Periodic surveys can provide more in-depth information once student parents are identified through other means.

Important Considerations

In addition to the recommendations above, there are several important considerations when collecting data on students' parenting status:

- **Consider how to store data:** There are at least three ways to store data for a dynamic variable that can change over time: one record per student, a new variable each time a student is asked, and a new record for each instance of data collection. These are illustrated and discussed in Sick and Anderson (2024). Currently, there are no universal best practices for storing parenting status. Legislation and state policies may dictate which data structure is necessary to satisfy reporting requirements. Wherever possible, colleges should adopt consistent practices with their state or system that ensure aggregate reporting is consistent and meaningful. State or system leadership can help with these data storage and process decisions.
- **Minimize threats to students:** Parenting students often interact with many different policy systems—including public human services and workforce programs, child care and education programs for their children, and employer policies—while juggling college requirements (Anderson and Green 2022). Given their many responsibilities and vulnerable positionality, parenting students often have concerns about data collection and the associated risks to their family's well-being.¹³ These concerns should be respected, and data should be handled securely (see below). Colleges and states should use all collected data to students' benefit.
- **Engage students:** Students' real-world needs may not align with college staff or faculty and policymakers' assumptions. Being responsive to students requires further engagement beyond collecting student-record data, including inviting students to co-lead college change efforts. The Urban Institute's "Rubric for the Authentic Engagement of Student Parents" can be a valuable resource for colleges, providing ideas and a framework to measure the robustness of their activities (Westaby et al. 2024).
- **Inform students:** Transparency and building trust are essential when collecting information about parenting status. The following is sample language derived from our experience on the D2A project which could be adapted to any questionnaire asking for parenting status, including being shortened or lengthened. This language can precede the questions, and any college using such language should ensure that each statement is true at their college and in their state:
 - » *We will now ask about your parenting status, including whether you are currently parenting [and/or pregnant or expectant]. [IF AT APPLICATION: This is the parenting status of the student who is applying—if a parent is completing this application on behalf of their child, this question refers to the student applicant.] COLLEGE is using this information to improve supports for [pregnant/expectant and] parenting students, including child care, course scheduling, and basic needs. [IF AT APPLICATION: Your response will not affect your admission chances in any way.] [IF APPLICABLE AT REGISTRATION: Your response will also determine whether you are eligible for priority registration.] Your response will help make our college more family friendly [OPTION: PROVIDE SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF A GOAL OR AN ACTION TAKEN]. We are required to submit this information to the state each [TERM/YEAR]. [STATE OFFICE] will similarly use the information to track outcomes and design or fund supports to help parenting students succeed. We respect your family's privacy, and your parenting[/pregnancy/expectancy] status will remain*

confidential and will not affect your academic options. [IF APPLICABLE: If you indicate that you are a parent, we will [reach out/email/etc.] with parent-specific support options to help address any needs you may have.] If you prefer not to share this information, you may select “prefer not to say” for any question.

- **Reach out to faculty:** Inform faculty about any surveys their students might be asked to take so they can promote them in class or in student communications. Informing faculty that the college is trying to understand and support their parenting students better can also help faculty members be more aware in their communications with students and help promote a family-friendly college culture.
- **Protect sensitive information:** Colleges have ample experience with collecting sensitive data from students, including financial circumstances, disabilities or other personal challenges, and academic outcomes. Colleges therefore already understand that sensitive student data must be collected, handled, stored, and used thoughtfully and securely. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects student data, including data on parenting status. The existing federal laws mandate that student data are handled securely, but it is up to states, systems, and colleges to interpret and implement the requirements. Resources, such as the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators’ decision tree and guide for data disclosure, show that data can be shared in aggregate, with student consent, and with other college officials who are determined to have a legitimate educational interest in the disclosed information.¹⁴ Any such data sharing should always be in pursuit of a clearly articulated purpose that is aimed at benefiting parenting students. Parenting status is not covered under medical data privacy rules *unless* the data are collected by someone acting in a medical capacity, such as a campus health care provider or mental health counselor. Some argue that parenting status is private medical information, but established practice does not treat parenting status more sensitively than student disability status, for example. An exception might be pregnancy status in states where there could be legal repercussions for pregnancy termination.

Known Challenges

During the D2A Campaign, colleges relayed several challenges and hurdles that may be relevant for others to consider as they seek to make similar changes:

- **Various SISs and capabilities.** Postsecondary institutions use various SISs, including Jenzabar, Oracle PeopleSoft, Ellucian Banner or Ellucian Colleague, and more. Not only do these platforms’ features and capabilities fundamentally differ, but colleges may have their own custom “implementation.” Therefore, one size does not fit all, and no single set of recommendations will work for every college.
- **Challenges connecting all relevant data across many systems.** A real-world example is a college that uses Salesforce, a student-facing Jenzabar SIS, a separate (but related) staff-facing Jenzabar Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, and a student academic platform on Blackboard tracking grades and coursework. This presents opportunities but also challenges for the institutional resource department to link and use data to its maximum potential.
- **SIS fields as a “finite resource.”** Some colleges cannot add new fields to their SIS at will. Instead, pre-existing fields need to be repurposed. “Check all that apply” questions are often useful

(such as the example above), but they require one data collection field per response option and therefore may use many fields. Colleges with finite SIS fields may need to avoid “check all that apply” approaches or carefully manage the number of response options.

- **Aligning supplemental tracking systems.** Some colleges use custom data collection tools outside their SIS which can cause data management challenges. For example, one college used a custom on-login nudge. The nudge redirected students from the SIS login screen to an external form where the data were captured. Institutional research staff subsequently needed to manually merge the nudge data with other student records, and parenting status was not stored in the SIS—meaning students could not view or update their status, no automated SIS reports on parenting status could be generated, and the college would struggle to connect parenting status with other student characteristics or outcomes data.
- **External data sources.** Some colleges rely on outside data tools, such as shared applications across a college, university, or state system. In such cases, the institution and institutional research department might not control the content or the usage of the data. This could limit what they hope to accomplish or require complex systematic changes.
- **Silos.** Silos are instances where teams or departments work separately and lack communication or data sharing. When silos cut across data collection and analysis infrastructure, it can make change difficult. For example, for-credit and non-credit (workforce) departments can be siloed, making it challenging to standardize data collection across all students. Silos between institutional research and student services can make it difficult to bring data-informed decisionmaking to student supports.
- **Time, funding, and expertise.** Many colleges lack resources to make all the changes they would like. Specific examples include programmer time, expertise and institutional knowledge after staff turnover, staff time to design processes, and adequate data systems.
- **Varying legislation and state data submission requirements.** Previous testimony has outlined considerations for effective legislation, regulation, and implementation (Anderson 2025). However, legislative bodies may have reasons to enact different sets of rules that either specify question wording or require a certain type of data structure.

College Examples

Several colleges in the D2A College Community of Practice illustrate key points and strategies articulated in this brief.

San Diego Mesa College Uses Data to Identify Student Struggles, and Bakersfield College Adapts a Survey

San Diego Mesa College examined student parent data alongside course completion rates and determined that parenting students were getting lower grades in certain courses compared with their non-parenting peers. In response, the college is implementing parent-specific tutoring, available at flexible times and focused on the programs or subject areas with the greatest opportunities for

improvement. The college also found that a rule in some programs where missing three classes resulted in failure was causing parents to fail at a higher rate than their non-parenting peers.

Previously, San Diego Mesa College’s data included all student parents, which they collected through a registration intake form (that also asks about other statuses and support needs), regardless of their dependents’ ages. Recognizing that parents of minor children (under 18) often face additional challenges such as limited time, financial constraints, and lack of parenting support, the district updated their intake form in Spring 2024 to collect the date of birth of the youngest dependent. San Diego Mesa College also administered comprehensive student parent perception surveys and conducted focus groups to gather more insightful data about the student parent population.

Another California community college in the D2A cohort, Bakersfield College, recognized the value in San Diego Mesa College’s student parent perception survey. Through collaboration in the community of practice, San Diego Mesa College shared their survey, and Bakersfield adapted it for their own campus with additional student-led testing and feedback. Bakersfield fielded the survey, using it to recruit students for focus groups and to understand student parent challenges and opportunities for success. They also relied on CCCApply, the California community colleges’ common application, where the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office had added student parenting status in response to the state’s legislative changes.

Oregon Colleges Choose Nudges and Surveys Over Registration Intake Forms

None of the five D2A Oregon community colleges chose to collect data using a registration intake form. Some mentioned past registrar concerns about adding new steps and potential barriers to course registration. Instead, three of the five colleges implemented an on-login nudge or a survey, and one of those colleges added a parenting status question to their application, while also collecting the status again later.

Each of the three colleges that implemented nudges tied them to SIS login, but their implementations differed. Southwestern Oregon Community College used the standard SIS “form flow” tools to launch a nudge. The downside of the standard SIS tools was their limited flexibility—they provided fewer options to make the nudge mandatory and adjust how it was deployed. Treasure Valley Community College had web development experience with ColdFusion—a programming language—and used that to implement a nudge they could better customize. However, that meant the nudge data were not automatically stored in their ERP, requiring an added step to merge the data with other student record data. The third college, Klamath Community College, implemented on-login SIS nudges and added the parenting questions to students’ SIS profile—meaning students could update their status at any time. The institutional researchers used SQL logic to build a current parenting status analysis indicator, since students could open the form multiple times, each time generating a new record in the system, and the most recent response might be blank or incomplete. This approach produced a high coverage rate, reaching over 80 percent of students.

The two colleges that did not implement nudges (Rogue Community College and Lane Community College) instead fielded student surveys that asked about parenting status, which had low response rates (under 10 percent). However, the surveys allowed them to ask varied questions, such as about student perceptions, the use of an on-campus child center, and the desire for child-friendly spaces on campus. Rogue Community College was planning to transition from a custom “homegrown” data system to a Jenzabar system when the Oregon student parent data collection mandate took effect. To avoid building a solution that would need to be reconfigured or recreated after a year, Rogue temporarily combined surveys they already conducted (the Community College Survey of Student Engagement) with a new parenting status survey. This is an example where a survey can serve as a stopgap between data systems, saving costs while still obtaining some information about parenting students. However, survey response rates were low, with a Community College Survey of Student Engagement response rate of less than 5 percent. Since their new data system has been established, Rogue is working to create a permanent student parent data collection solution. Lane also implemented a survey to collect parenting status and the ages of children, which was linked to student demographics, Pell status, academic status, field and level of study, and academic outcomes such as GPA, completion, and retention.

The City Colleges of Chicago District Office Is Exploring Data Sharing with Colleges

When joining the D2A cohort, City Colleges of Chicago initially relied on a district-wide college application question to identify parenting students. However, this approach only captured parenting status at the time of application and lacked details (e.g., number and ages of dependents) needed to inform targeted supports. As an interim solution, individual colleges began administering demographic surveys—first piloted by Harry S. Truman College and later adopted more broadly—to gather additional insights on students’ caregiving responsibilities and related factors such as housing and food insecurity. Although these surveys yielded valuable information, response rates remained below 20 percent. To improve data quality and coverage, the City Colleges district office is developing a new student portal pop-up nudge to collect parenting status and related details annually and will integrate this data into its system-wide warehouse for easier access by college teams. The district office has begun to disaggregate key student and institutional outcome indicators by parenting status for use in strategic planning and other decisionmaking. The district office plans to make this information more readily accessible to individual college teams in Fall 2025.

Cal Poly SLO Develops a Data Dashboard

Despite having a relatively small parenting student population, California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly SLO) was a leader in developing an online data dashboard¹⁵ with parenting student statistics. The dashboard is curated by institutional research and uses internal data to display the headcount, enrollment status, academic class, program, race/ethnicity, gender, age, and Pell receipt statuses. Cal Poly SLO also developed an online infographic for their web page summarizing similar key statistics of the parenting student population. Cal Poly SLO explored multiple ways to use data to heighten the visibility of parenting students.

California State University Chancellor’s Office Developed a Tool for Colleges

The CSU Chancellor’s Office quickly implemented a new priority registration module—their term for a registration intake form—for parenting students. Students get an SIS alert about registration, and they can also update their parenting status and registration information at any time. The CSU Chancellor’s Office is also in the process of adding the same parenting status data questions to the shared application form, Cal State Apply.

The primary advantage to this approach was that campuses in the system immediately gained access to a parenting status data collection tool, with little to no development costs of their own. One minor challenge with this approach was that because the module was external to each individual campus, some work was required to integrate the data with their other systems. One college had to add several analysis steps to link their various data systems (e.g., EAB and PeopleSoft) with the new student parent data, meaning reporting tasks could involve additional effort.

Conclusions

This brief evolves the ideas initially shared in “How Should Colleges Collect Parenting Student Data? Version 1.0” (Sick and Anderson 2024). The updates were informed by continued engagement with the cohort of nine colleges and one citywide system across the two-year D2A project.

In Version 2.0, we present improved recommendations for how to ask students their parenting status and how to collect that data. We recommend a layered approach to student parent data collection, where colleges use a combination of an initial student census (or near-census) collected at application or enrollment, followed by registration touchpoints or on-login nudges. Periodic surveys can provide more in-depth information once student parents are identified through other means. We also identify known challenges and important considerations, new language on how to introduce parenting status questions to students, and examples of colleges making these changes in the real world.

We hope this brief can help colleges, systems, and states respond to new data collection mandates and be well positioned to use those data to support parenting student success.

Notes

- ¹ “Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students,” Urban Institute, accessed August 8, 2025, <https://www.urban.org/projects/data-action-campaign-parenting-students/student-parent-action-and-advisory-group>.
- ² We would like to thank Child Trends, and Renee Ryberg in particular, for conducting cognitive interviews with student parents on these questions and sharing their findings and feedback with our team. That feedback resulted in modifications of the example questions published in Sick and colleagues (2023). This brief suggests additional question modifications based on feedback from the D2A Board of Advisors, particularly Raheem Brooks and Elizabeth Osche.
- ³ During Child Trends’ cognitive testing, the term “solo parent” was not favored by the student testers.

- ⁴ “Title IX Basics,” *The Pregnant Scholar*, Center for WorkLife Law at UC College of the Law, San Francisco, accessed August 8, 2025, <https://thepregnantscholar.org/title-ix-basics>.
- ⁵ Legislation in several states, including Illinois, Oregon, and Texas, requires annual collection.
- ⁶ See: <https://apply.commonapp.org>.
- ⁷ See: <https://www.calstate.edu/apply>.
- ⁸ See: <https://home.cccapply.org/en>.
- ⁹ See: <https://www.applytexas.org>.
- ¹⁰ See: <https://apply.ccc.edu>.
- ¹¹ A note on data system terminology: There are many names for web-based applications used to collect student data. Some platforms are designed with students in mind, while others have broader uses but can be adapted for student data. Typically, the student-facing application for student records is the student information system (SIS) and the student academic platform is the learning management system (LMS). However, student data may be collected on platforms known as enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, or management information systems (MIS). In this brief we generally refer to SIS and LMS, but the acronyms above can be considered mostly interchangeable, as each may be relevant to collecting student parenting status (or other) data depending on colleges’ unique data infrastructure.
- ¹² See: <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/colleges-will-need-new-data-collection-efforts-identify-parenting-students-after-changes>.
- ¹³ For example, in many states, students can face legal repercussions if they terminate their pregnancy, even if termination begins spontaneously or for reasons that might be considered medically necessary. Collecting data on a student’s pregnancy status in those states could put the student at risk if that pregnancy does not come to term and the pregnant/parenting data are disclosed to authorities, prompting a legal investigation.
- ¹⁴ See: https://www.nasfaa.org/uploads/documents/NASPA_Decisiontree_Data_Sharing.pdf.
- ¹⁵ “Students with Dependents Population Data,” Office of the Dean of Students, *Student Affairs*, Cal Poly, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://deanofstudents.calpoly.edu/test-swd-population-data>.

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Nathan Sick is a senior research associate in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. He has more than 13 years of experience in workforce development, postsecondary education policy research, and program evaluation. He also has extensive experience as an analyst and in the design, implementation, and support of data collection methods, such as surveys and web-based applications. Sick's work focuses on the future of health care career pathways, particularly in the sustainability of entry-level direct care work and the costs of training. His work explores ways to close equity gaps and improve job quality for marginalized or disadvantaged workers who are trying to start a career and earn a family-sustaining wage. Sick is also interested in research to make postsecondary education more flexible and accessible to all and more closely connected to high-quality career opportunities, particularly for parenting students, who often balance school with work and child care responsibilities. He has an MS in chemistry from the University of Chicago.

Theresa Anderson is a senior fellow in the Workforce, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. Her work focuses on improving access to and success in education across the life course, from early childhood to adulthood, and examining how postsecondary education can support families and communities. A national expert on issues pregnant and parenting students and families face, Anderson informs policy and practice strategies to help them achieve their goals. She also specializes in US social safety net programs and has examined opportunities to better align human services and education systems to promote student success. Anderson holds a BA from Hampshire College and an MPP and PhD in public policy and public administration from the George Washington University.

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