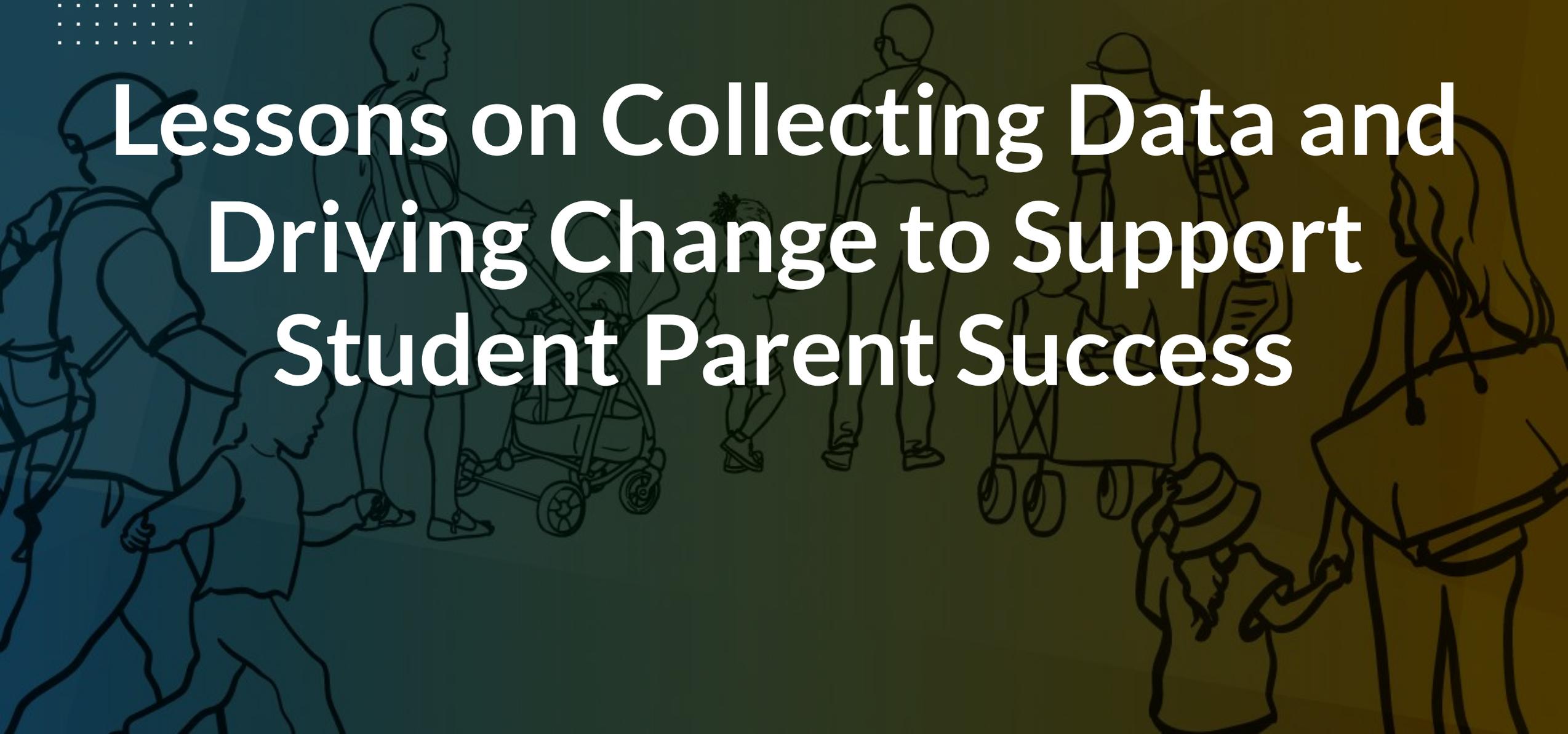# Lessons on Collecting Data and Driving Change to Support Student Parent Success

Welcome!

- Today's event is being recorded, and the recording will be posted online at **urban.org/events** in the coming days.

    - We'll also email the link to all registrants.

- The biographies for today's speakers and their slides are available on the event page.

- Our virtual audience can submit questions using the form shared in the chat.

    - Those of you in the room can scan the QR code to access the form.
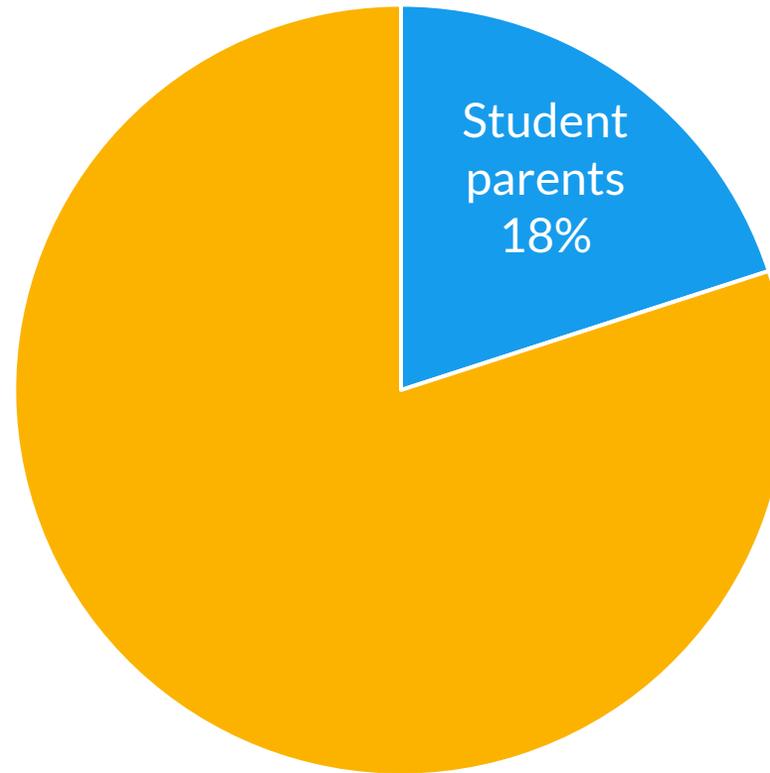
We very much appreciate our funders

ECMC Foundation

The Ford Family Foundation

Lumina Foundation

Who are student parents?

Undergrads, 2020

Student parents 18%

3.1 million

Parenting students are a key population

- **Almost three-quarters** had a non-work-study job

  - Worked **36** hours per week (on average)

- **More than twice as likely** to be enrolled part time

  - But had GPAs **similar to** nonparenting classmates

- Had **2** children on average

Juggling three heavy balls!

➔ Only 17 percent earn a degree within six years, compared to 50 percent of nonparents

· U R B A N · I N S T I T U T E ·

There is a large overlap with other priority groups

18%
of undergraduate students are parents
3.14 million

22%
of undergraduates at community and technical colleges are parents
1.57 million

COMMUNITY OR TECHNICAL COLLEGE

28%
of first-gen undergraduates are parents
1.51 million

1st Gen

45%
of veteran undergraduates are parents
286,000

Supporting Student Parents Pays off

Payoffs for mothers

Mothers who reenroll in school

+ $2,800/year earnings gain

Mothers who reenroll and complete a degree

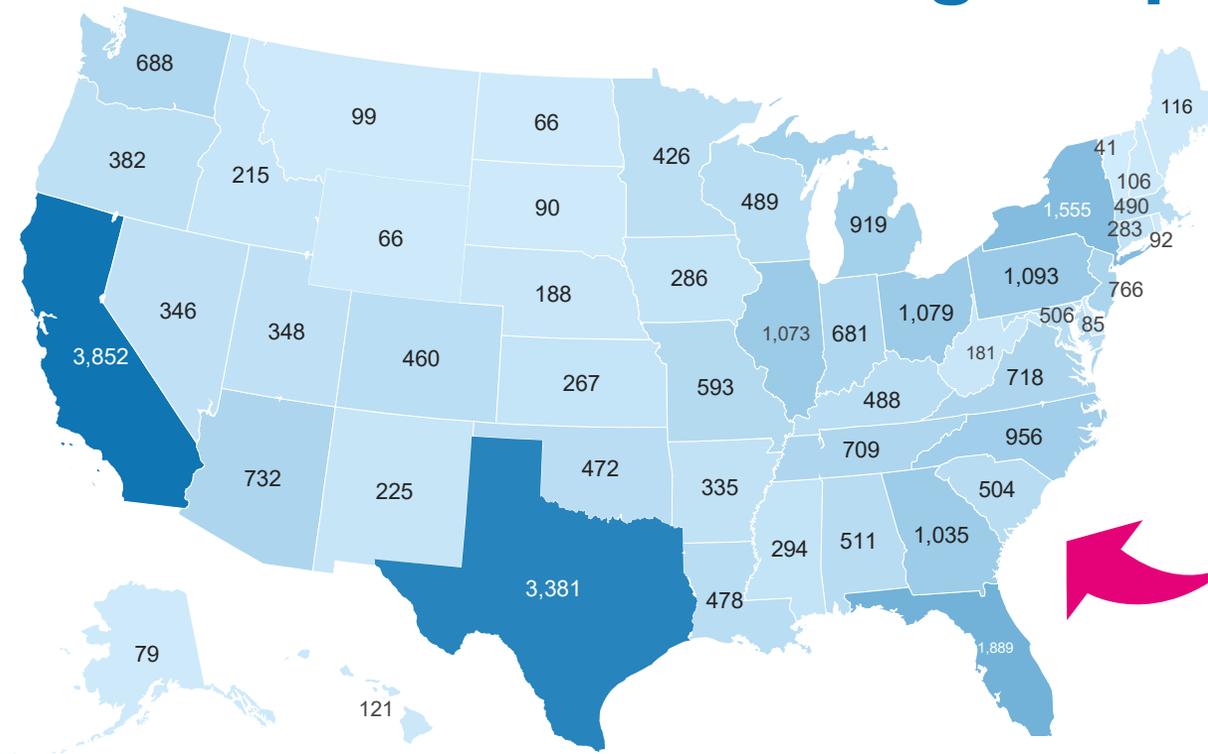**+** $9,200/year earnings gain

Payoffs for children

Children of mothers who reenroll and complete a degree

+ Gains in reading and verbal scores

+ 9% more likely to complete high school
21% more likely to enroll in college
38% more likely to get a college degree

+ $5,600 average earnings gain per year in early adulthood

Payoffs for colleges

There are nearly 31 million parents without a college degree—over one-third have some college experience

688
99
66
116
382
41
215
426
489
106
490
90
919
1,555
283
92
66
1,093
766
188
286
506 85
346
1,073 681
1,079
348
181
3,852
460
267
593
488
718
709
956
732
225
472
335
504
3,381
294 511
1,035
478
79
1,889
121

Thousands of parents without a college degree, by state

This is an important recruitment population!

URBAN·INSTITUTE

9

Payoffs for states

Investing in student parents pays off for taxpayers through higher taxes and lower benefit receipt

Specifically:

- **targeted supportive programming at public colleges** pays for itself $5.36 per $1.00 spent

- **a $3000 annual scholarship for low-income parents** pays for itself $1.73 per $1.00 spent

- **affordable on-campus child care** pays for itself $1.24 per $1.00 spent (and yields the largest increase in graduates)

That doesn't even count all the personal benefits to students and families – or broader benefits to communities!

· U R B A N · I N S T I T U T E ·

"When you are invisible, so are your problems."
—Oregon campaign for student-parent data legislation

- Data motivate change

- Averages on the national, regional, or even state level hide variation specific to local contexts

- Colleges and college systems needs to be able to identify:

  - How many parenting students they are serving, and how many could they be serving

  - What their parenting students' characteristics are

 - Their students' trajectories, as well as tripping points and successes

Legislative change
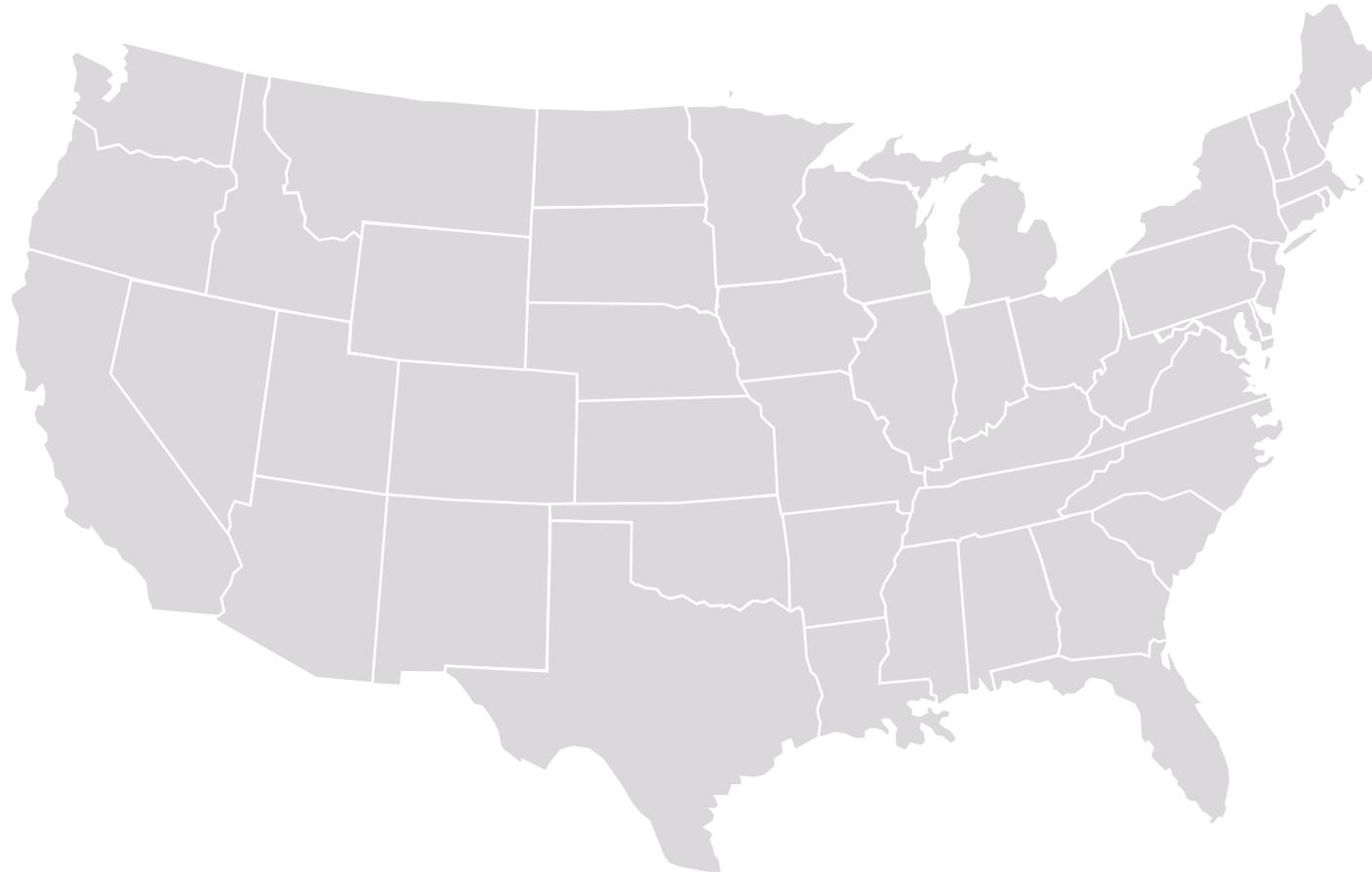
🔵 = current active data collection requirement
🟧 = some past data collection requirement

Origin of the Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students

Urban developed a college learning community in states with data collection mandates to help with data development that would inform actions to support student parent success
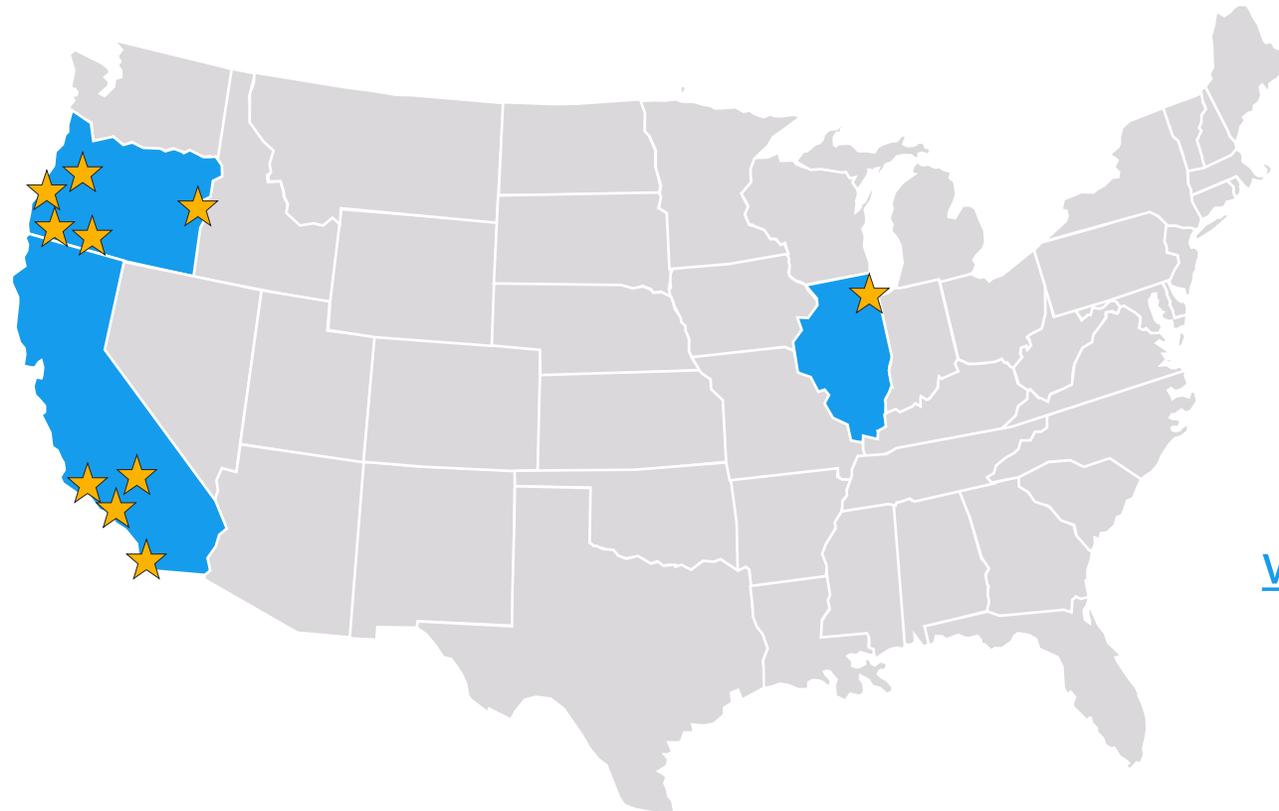
www.urban.org/projects/
data-action-campaign-
parenting-students

10 College Partners

Bakersfield College – Bakersfield, CA

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo – San Luis Obispo, CA

California State University, Channel Islands – Camarillo, CA

City Colleges of Chicago – Chicago, IL

Klamath Community College – Klamath Falls, OR

Lane Community College – Eugene, OR

Rogue Community College – Grants Pass, OR

San Diego Mesa College – San Diego, CA

Southwestern Oregon Community College – Coos Bay, OR

Treasure Valley Community College – Ontario, OR
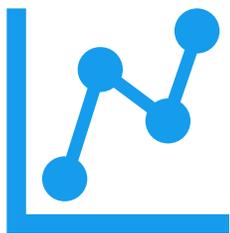
Data technical
assistance
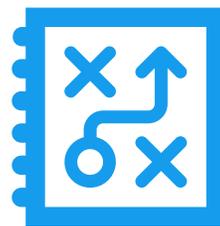
Action coaching

Community
learning

Policy and practice
insights

Informing
decisionmakers

15

SPARK Collaborative

Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge

StudentParentAction.org

Lessons on Collecting Data and Driving Change to Support Student Parent Success

Lessons on Collecting Data and Driving Change to Support Student Parent Success

Recommendations for Student-Parent Data Collection

URBAN INSTITUTE · ELEVATE · THE · DEBATE

October 9, 2025

More than 20 definitions… and no two are the same

"Student parent" means a student who has a child or children under 18 years of age who will receive more than half of their support from that student.

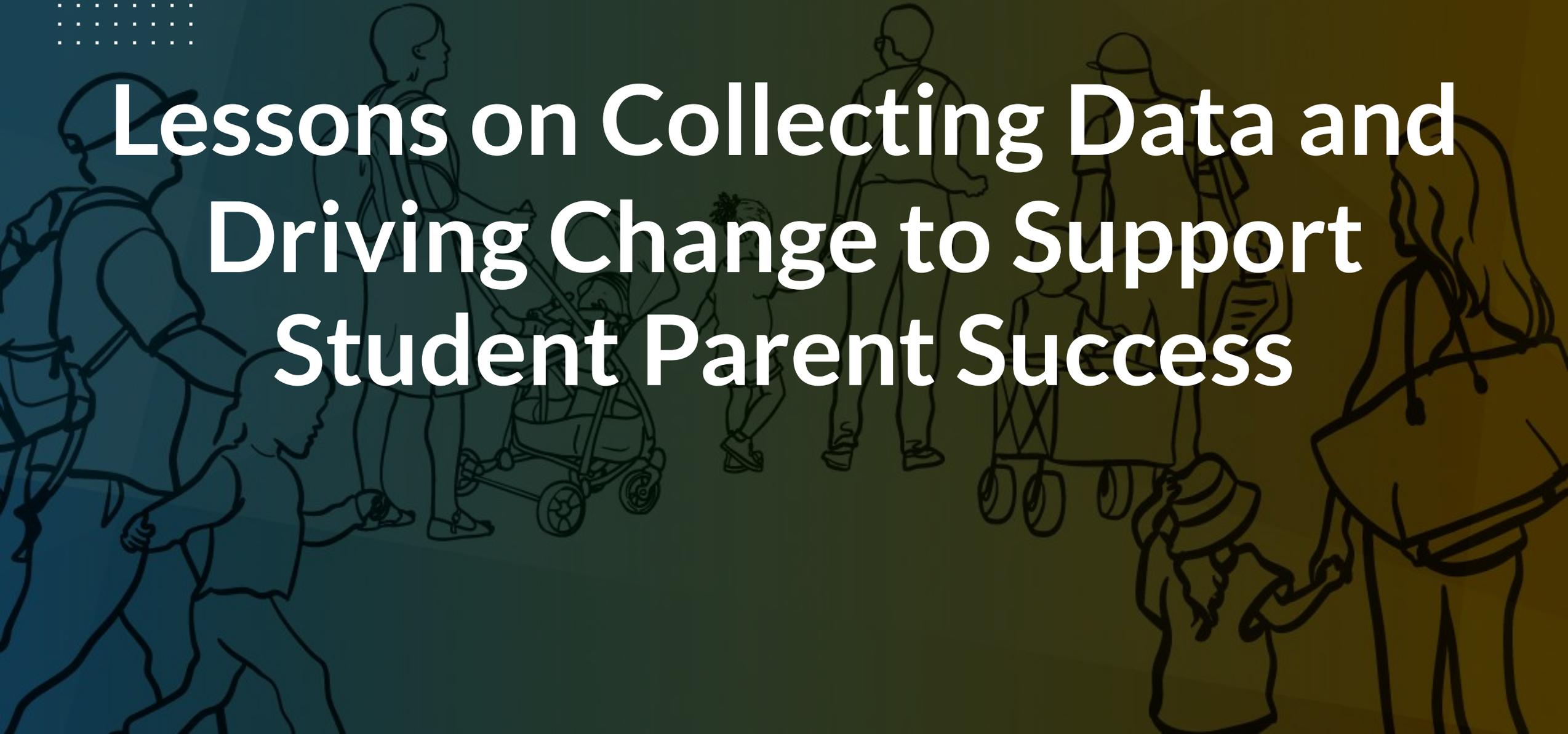Do you now have or will you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between [date] and [date]?

"Parent" means having a child or children younger than 18 years of age who the respondents are responsible for and who live in their households.

Are you a parent of dependent children?

Do you have children who live with you and depend on you for their care?

Are you the parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children?

Are you the parent or guardian to any biological, adopted, step, or foster children who live in your household?

Definitions vary by:

Amount of time a person cares for a child

- e.g., most, more than half, or primary

Legal or dependent status

- Excludes many parenting relationships

Live in the same household

Legal minors

Including or excluding those who are pregnant or expectant

The conditions matter

Millions of Student Parents by Different Definitions

2017 Survey of Income and Program Participation

Bar chart showing:
- Child(ren) of any age: 5.4
- Child(ren) of any age, in the same household: 5.2
- Child(ren) under age 18, in the same household: 4.7
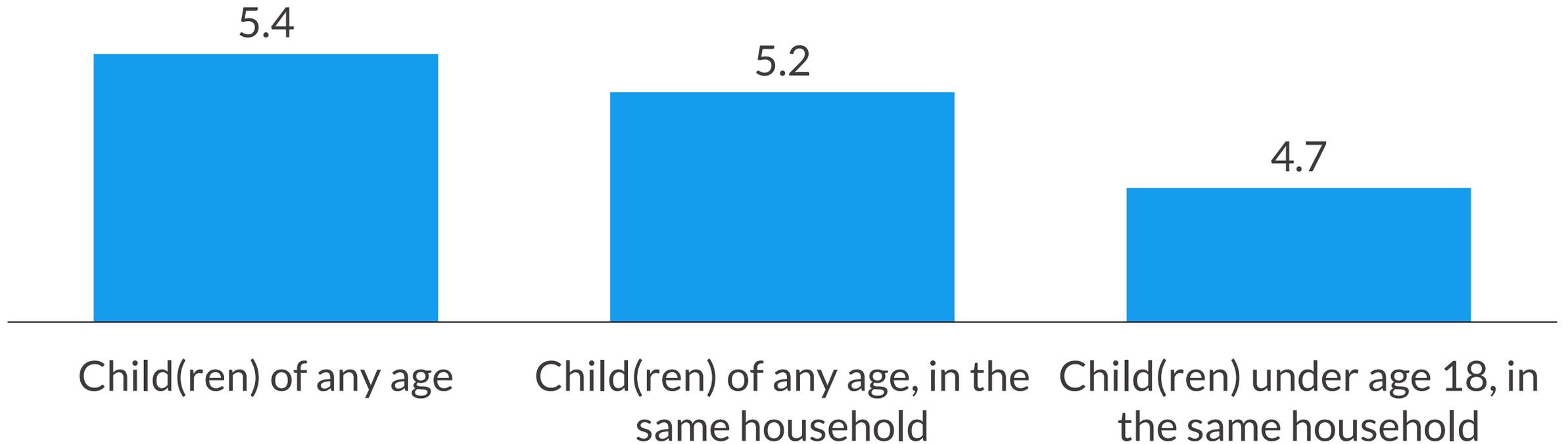
Our preferred definition:

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.

Guidance available:
Includes sample questions and collection strategies

https://www.urban.org/research/publication/how-should-colleges-collect-parenting-student-data-version-20

DATA-TO-ACTION CAMPAIGN FOR PARENTING STUDENTS

URBAN INSTITUTE

How Should Colleges Collect Parenting Student Data? (Version 2.0)
An Updated Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners

Nathan Sick and Theresa Anderson
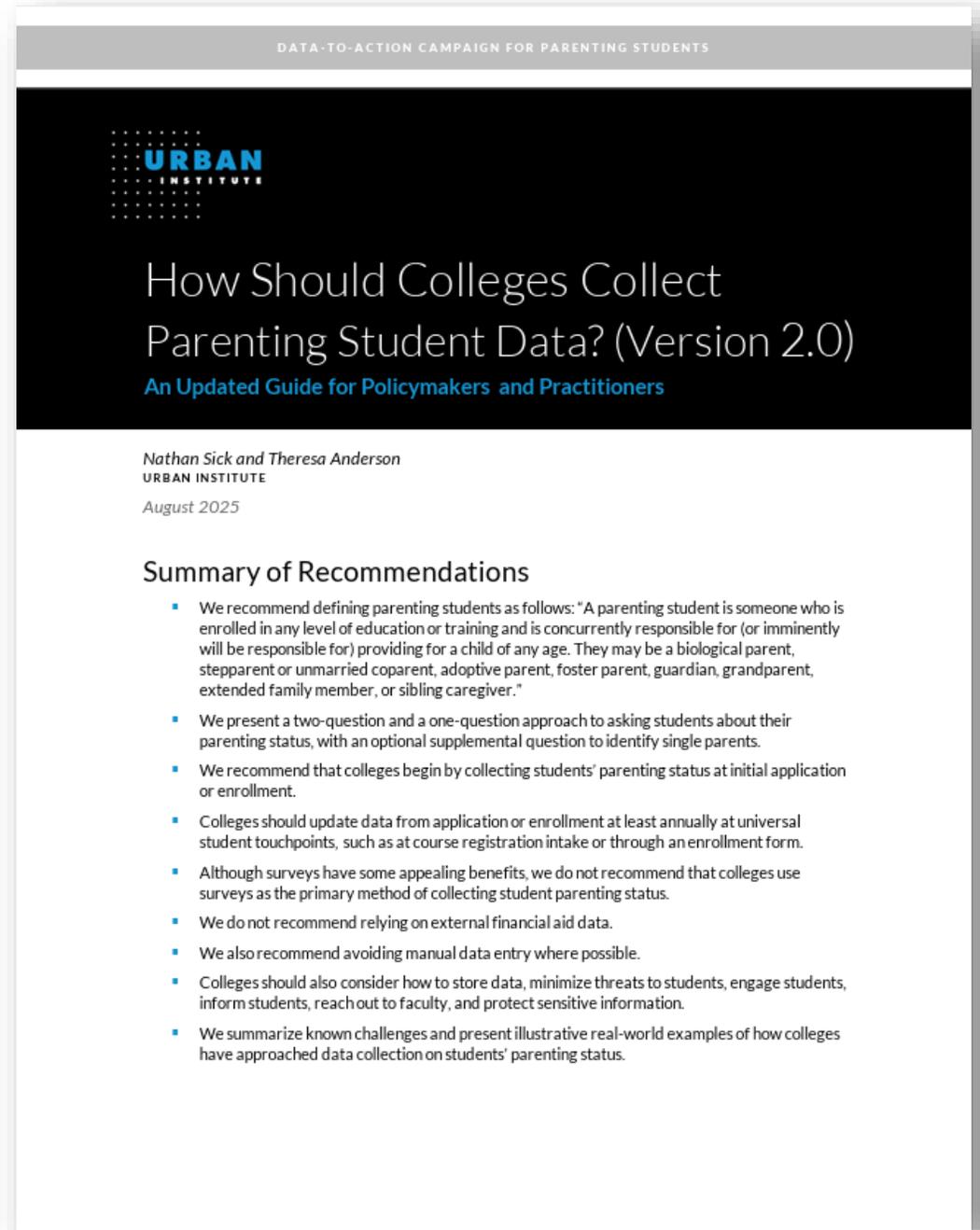URBAN INSTITUTE

August 2025

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.

23

Steps colleges can take
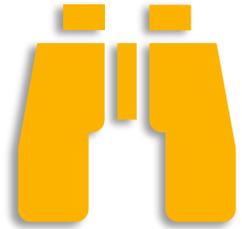
Examine their data capacity and reflect on data insights

Document resources that can be shared with students and used to guide future actions

Develop specific strategies for using data to take action

URBAN INSTITUTE

Steps colleges can take

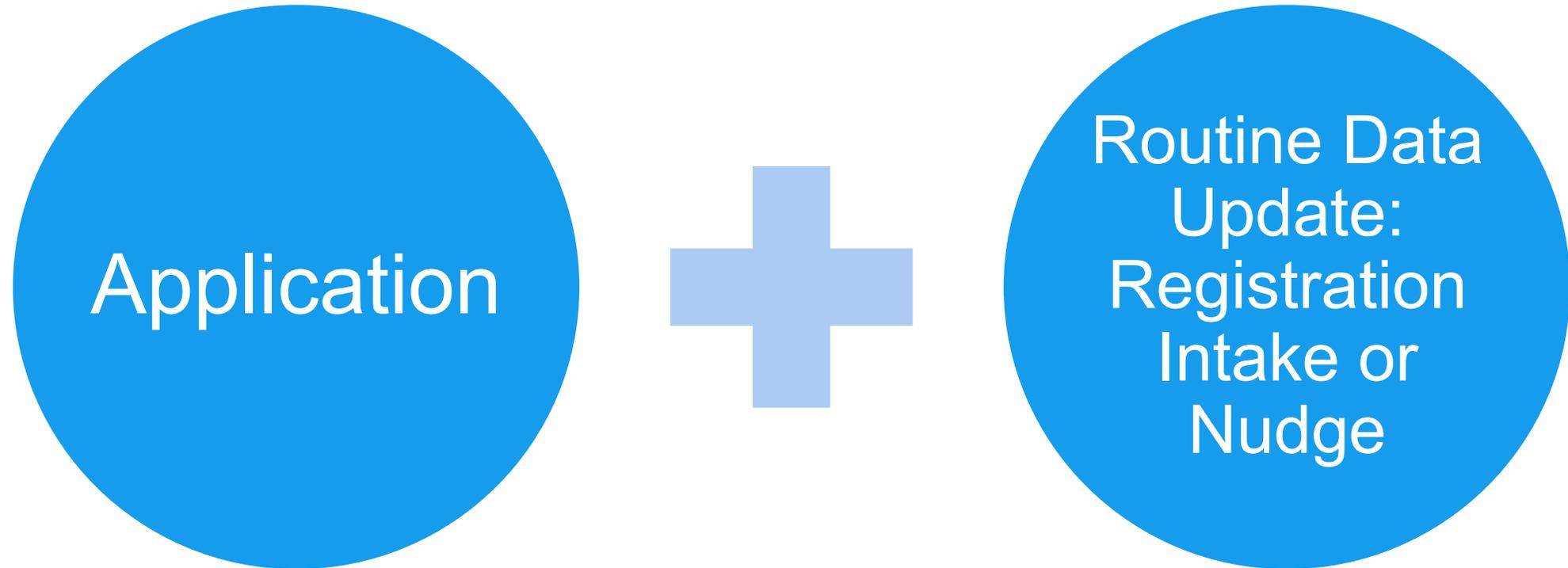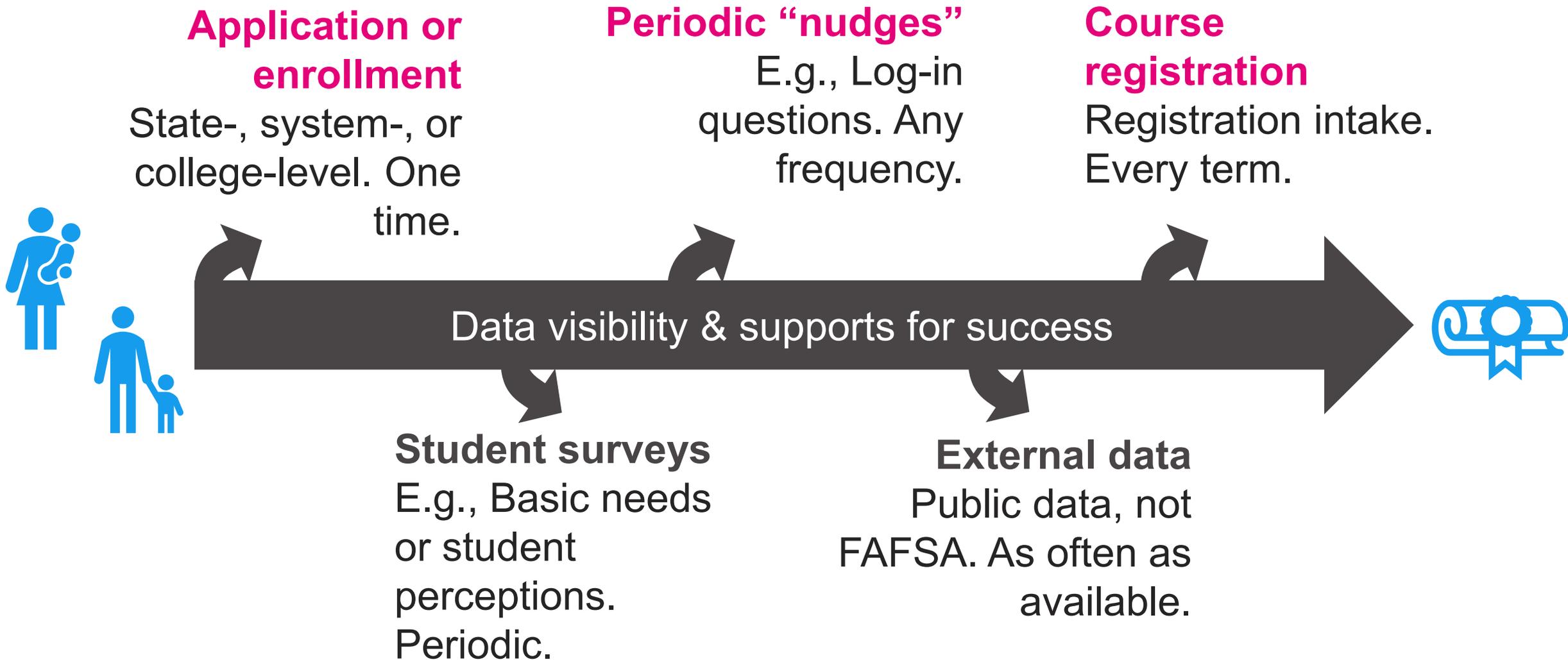Develop specific strategies for visibility and stakeholder engagement

Learn about new best practices to engage students and leverage their expertise

Codify goals in their institutional strategy!

Recommended data collection practice

Application + **Routine Data Update: Registration Intake or Nudge**

Application or enrollment
State-, system-, or college-level. One time.

Periodic "nudges"
E.g., Log-in questions. Any frequency.

Course registration
Registration intake. Every term.

Data visibility & supports for success

Student surveys
E.g., Basic needs or student perceptions. Periodic.

External data
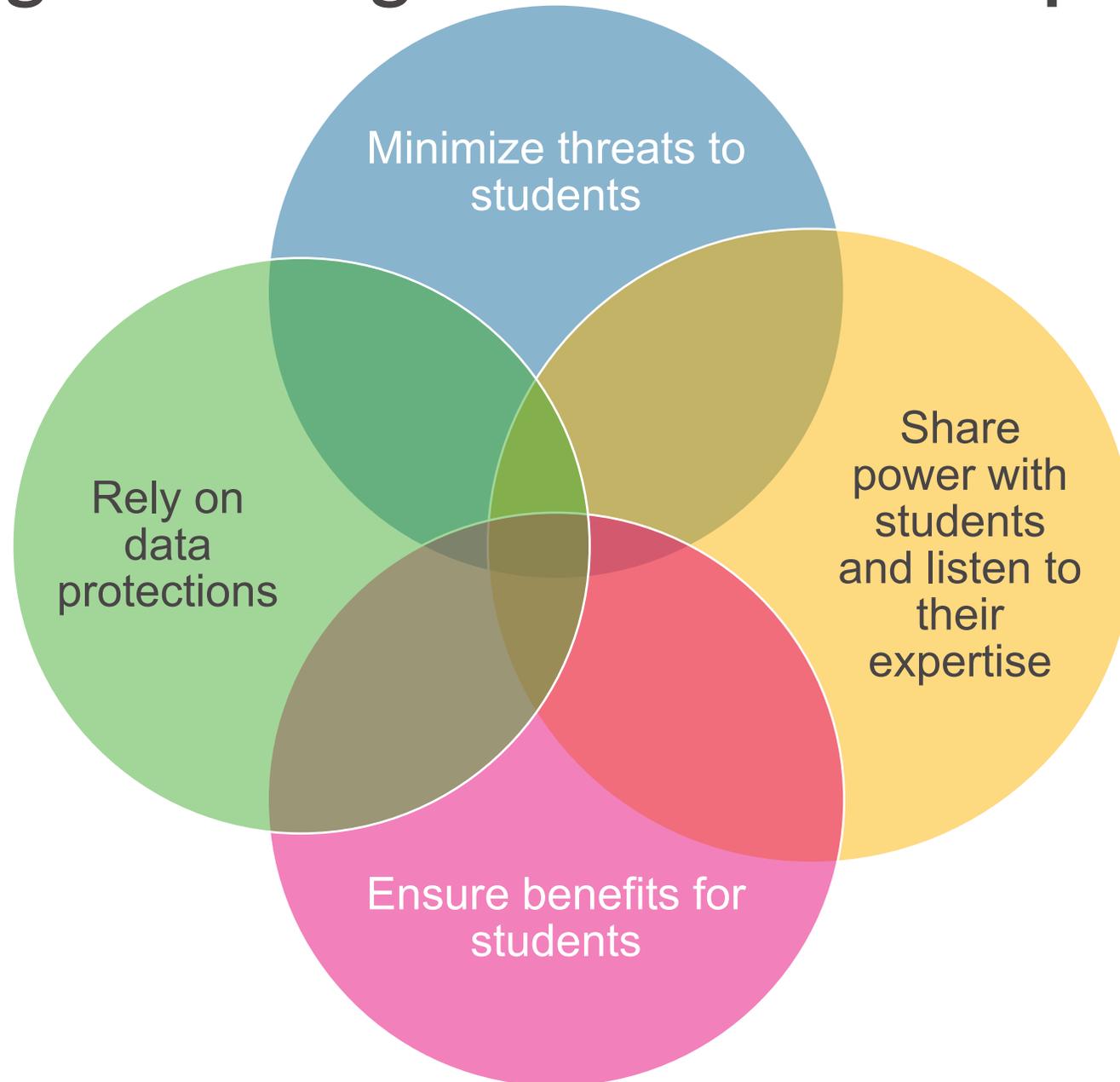Public data, not FAFSA. As often as available.

FAFSA no longer provides useful information about most students with dependents

See blog post here:
urbn.is/NoMoreFAFSAforSPs

Collecting data using student-centered principles

Learn more

www.urban.org/projects/
data-action-campaign-parenting-students