

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

### Speaker Biographies

**Johanna Aleman** serves as the Basic Needs Coordinator for San Diego Mesa College, having built basic needs from the ground up, she now leads the campuses comprehensive program of supports for basic needs, Fresh Success, and student parents. She has over ten years' experience in basic needs and twenty-five years in higher education working in categorical programs focused on supporting historically underserved populations, this includes TRiO/Student Support Services, Disability Support Programs & Services, and Student Success and Equity program. Johanna has a M.A. in History from San Diego State, where she focused on gender and politics.

**Theresa Anderson** is a senior fellow in the Workforce, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. She leads teams conducting in-depth, mixed-methods research on workforce, education, and social safety net programs and policies. 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, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and has examined opportunities to better align human services and education systems to promote student success. She coleads the Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative, a multiorganization partnership advancing data, research, and awareness to support student parents and their families in achieving their education goals. Anderson holds a BA from Hampshire College and an MPP and PhD in public policy and public administration from the George Washington University. She occasionally teaches as a visiting lecturer or adjunct faculty member at the George Washington University.

**Tina Cheuk** is an Associate Professor at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo, where her research examines science education, bilingual education, and the experiences of student parents in higher education. A founder of the Student Parent Joy media campaign, she is committed to reshaping narratives about parenting in college by centering strength, resilience, and joy. Her advocacy extends through policy and initiative development in California and nationally, advancing greater support for student parents in higher education. Featured in *Raising Up*, a docu-series investigating the barriers student parents face, Tina works to drive organizational change that uplifts student parents and their families.

**Brittany Jackson Kairis** serves as Vice Chancellor for Strategy and Planning at City Colleges of Chicago, where she provides strategic leadership in data-informed decision-making, research, and institutional effectiveness. Working directly with the Chancellor's executive team, she drives the development and implementation of CCC's strategic framework, ensuring alignment across the district's seven colleges. With more than 15 years of experience in urban education, Brittany has served in diverse roles including classroom teacher, program administrator, and institutional research leader. She brings deep expertise in translating complex data into actionable strategies that advance institutional goals. Her leadership has been instrumental in establishing institutional health dashboards and benchmarking systems while fostering a culture of data-informed continuous improvement throughout the organization. Brittany holds a Bachelor of Psychology from Marian University-Indianapolis and a Master of Science in Education from Northwestern University.

**Kevin Relf** is a student at Lane Community College and will be transferring to the University of Oregon for a Bachelor's Degree at the School of Planning, Public Policy and Management. He brings unique parenting student perspectives and a wide array of management, communication, and leadership skills. As a STAR Fellow, Kevin is excited to make new connections, obtain leadership and data skills, and obtain more experience in public policy.

**Gail Schull** is the Vice President of Student Affairs at Klamath Community College in Southern Oregon. A first-generation college graduate and student parent, she brings both lived experience and leadership to her work advancing data-informed strategies that improve outcomes for student parents. Gail earned her associate's degree from Cabrillo College, a bachelor's in Women's Studies from UC Santa Cruz, and a master's in Education from Idaho State University, where she is currently working on her doctoral dissertation. She is also a proud wife and mom of two sons, drawing inspiration from her family in her ongoing commitment to student success.

**Nathan Sick** is a senior research associate in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. He has more than 10 years of experience in workforce development and postsecondary education policy research. 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. 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. Finally, Sick pursues novel ways to use data and data systems that lead to better outcomes for people who are struggling to obtain a good, family-sustaining job. Before joining Urban, Sick was a policy analyst at the Capital Research Corporation and a high school chemistry teacher. He has an MS in chemistry from the University of Chicago.

**Katonja Webb Walker** has served as President of Kennedy-King College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago since 2022. Dr. Webb Walker has over 25 years' experience in the nonprofit and education sectors where she has exercised her calling and deep commitment to improving educational outcomes for urban students – particularly first-generation college students. Dr. Webb Walker has held positions in K-12 school districts including Dual Credit Coordinator and Deputy Chief of Staff, as well as at community-based organizations, where she served as founding Executive Director of the Illinois Education Foundation, now One Million Degrees, a key partner in promoting the success of students at City Colleges of Chicago. She went on to serve as the Associate Director of the Center for Urban Education Leadership at University of Illinois Chicago, and then at Malcolm X College and Kennedy-King College in the roles of Dean of Continuing Education and Senior Vice President of Academic & Student Affairs. Dr. Webb Walker, a first-generation college graduate, earned a Bachelor's degree in psychology from Harvard University and a Master's degree in Education Policy, Planning, and Administration from Boston University prior to completing her doctorate at Northeastern University.

**Kate Westaby** is a research associate in the Work, Education, and Labor Division at the Urban Institute. She specializes in mixed-methods and community-participatory research, with a focus on young parents in education, health, and economic mobility. Her work centers on college opportunity, well-being, and dignity for young and student parents, with additional expertise in student basic needs and child care in higher education. Westaby builds trusting, participatory research partnerships with young parents and is the founding director of the Young Parent Collective, a group of young and teen parents who research and advocate for issues related to parenting. At Urban, Westaby primarily works on supporting access and

persistence for parenting students in college, including through her role as a founding team member of the Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge Collaborative. Westaby has more than 15 years of experience as an evaluation researcher, assessing programs in health education and workforce. She received a BS in psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire, an MS in applied psychology from the University of Wisconsin–Stout, and a PhD in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Wisconsin–Madison.