Identifying Institutional Needs for Student Parents in Community Colleges

Recommendations for Successful Policy and Practice

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Recommendations for Successful Policy and Practice
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ABSTRACT:

Community colleges serve as the primary entry point for many nontraditional student populations. Over 3.8 million students in higher education are student parents (e.g., college students with dependents), and 42% of student parents are enrolled in community colleges across the country. In this report, we center the voices and experiences of student parents as well as the resources needed to better support them in two-year colleges. We have developed this report based on content analysis and interviews with 100+ student parents and five community college staff members who work in student-parent specific programs (i.e., student-parent initiatives, CARE, CalWORKS). We provide recommendations for improved institutional and system-wide practices, and detail student parent programs and resources available at 30+ community colleges. The goal of this report is to illuminate opportunities for community college leaders, staff, and faculty to address the specific needs of student parents that can impact policies and practices that increase degree and certificate completion. Enhanced support systems are needed for student parents as this group is relatively invisible and underserved at community colleges due to inaccurate reporting of their enrollment, persistence, and degree completion.

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INTRODUCTION

Each semester, student parents enroll in community colleges across the country to earn a degree or certificate to secure needed professional credentials to move their life forward. Unexpectedly, many student parents struggle to navigate their two-year college experience as roadmaps are unavailable for students with dependents at higher education institutions (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Huerta et al., 2022; Sallee & Cox, 2019). The institutional barriers that students experience in colleges shed light on the high attrition rates for student parents; 52% of student parents left college without a degree in six years versus 32% of students without dependents (GAO, 2019). Over 3.8 million student parents are currently enrolled in higher education with more than 1.5 million enrolled in community colleges (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019). Student parents, like most first-generation and low-income students, need roadmaps on how to best navigate higher education institutions (Brown & Nichols, 2013; Huerta et al., 2022; Sallee & Cox, 2019). Without tailored support from colleges and universities, many student parents feel confused and isolated on college campuses, and this contributes to high attrition rates. The needs and demands of student parents matter in the higher education landscape as more than one in five college students have a dependent and do not earn college degrees at the same rate as their childless peers (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019). Often, college administrators are not empathetic to the unique needs of student parents, nor are their institutions equipped with the financial resources to help student parents navigate their journey. The institutional barriers that students experience in colleges shed light on the high attrition rates for student parents; 52% of student parents left college without a degree in six years versus 32% of students without dependents (GAO, 2019). Despite these numbers, many student parents outperform their childless peers academically in college (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019). However, their ability to complete and earn college degrees or certificates in a timely manner is disrupted when they have to handle domestic responsibilities, unexpected dependent demands, or child illness (Wladis et al., 2018). Wladis and colleagues (2018) identify the time challenges of student parents as "time poverty" due to domestic and child responsibilities that prevent full engagement in college courses. With the current context of student parents in mind, this report provides an overview of 37 community colleges nationwide and details their collective efforts to support student parents in persisting in higher education as well as provide differentiated support services.

RESEARCH APPROACH

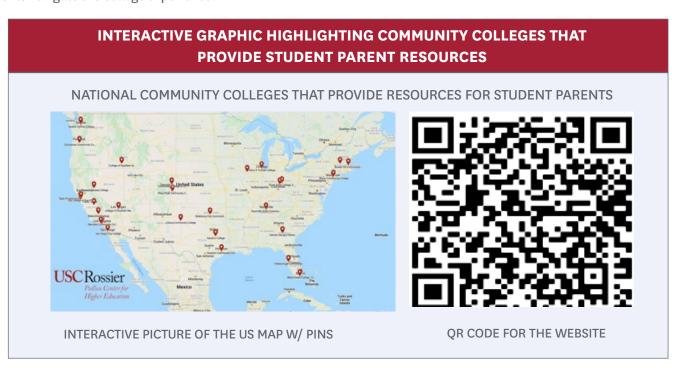Using content analysis and qualitative methods, we identified 37 community colleges in 18 states that provide differentiated resources and services to student parents. We use two perspectives to situate issues related to persistence and degree completion for student parents by conducting individual interviews with staff of five student parent programs and 100+ student parents at three community colleges.

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This report is designed to help community college leadership understand the multiple tensions student parents face in community colleges. As community colleges slowly reopen to students after the COVID-19 pandemic, with the increased national attention and financial investments, it is a crucial moment to know how they are providing access to various parent-focused resources and how these resources can be reimagined to infuse equitable practices and strategies to support more student parents. The information provided in this report is not meant to be exhaustive but instead provides:

- An overview of current resources available for student parents in some community colleges
- Areas for growth and development to refine resources for student parents in community college
- Critical information that can help community college staff, faculty, and leadership provide targeted support for student parents to promote enrollment and degree completion

The data for this report was collected through phone calls, video conference interviews, U.S. Census Bureau data, and community college student parent program websites during the 2021-2022 academic year. Student parent interview data was collected in multiple waves between 2018 and 2022. At the time of data collection, student parents were enrolled in college courses either full or part time and used a wide range of family, partner, and local service providers for child care. This report highlights trends that can help practitioners, campus leaders, and student parent advocates understand a new perspective on how student parents navigate the college experience.

INTERACTIVE GRAPHIC HIGHLIGHTING COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT PROVIDE STUDENT PARENT RESOURCES

NATIONAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES THAT PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR STUDENT PARENTS

INTERACTIVE PICTURE OF THE US MAP W/ PINS

QR CODE FOR THE WEBSITE

In the associated online graphic, we highlight the efforts of 37 community colleges that provide on-campus child care services to support staff, faculty, and student parents. To fully understand the challenges student parents manage, we provide:

- Information on the cost of attendance fees
- A breakdown of the cost of local and college-based child care expenses
- Details on local minimum wage rates and estimated monthly incomes based on a 40-hour work week

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Combined, this information contextualizes the cost-benefit analysis that student parents face when deciding whether to enroll or persist in higher education. It is therefore critical for community college leaders to be familiar with this descriptive financial information in order to understand the possible financial pressure points that student parents experience should they enroll and forgo employment in the local labor market. Other scholars have previously established that many community colleges do not have the infrastructure or financial resources to fully support student parents in higher education (Cox & Sallee, 2018). For example, Pell Grants may not fully assume the total cost of attendance for many low-income student parents enrolled full time in community college (Delisle, 2021). Many student parents assume large student loan debt to offset their costs of college attendance Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020). Meeting the financial demands of monthly rent, child care, children's clothing, college expenses, utilities, and other set expenses is not attainable for most without the use of student loans; the median debt for student parents in higher education is 2.5 times higher, $6,500 versus $2,500, than for students without children (Huerta et al., 2022; Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020).

To increase awareness, we encourage college leaders to review college and associated expenses that student parents must assume to become full-time college students. Often, community college leaders are unaware of how some institutional policies may contribute to restricting access to campus-based resources for student parents. Policies related to students' income or previous academic units attempted or earned impact both part- and full-time college enrollment decisions. Colleges' decisions about students' financial status may significantly affect their livelihood. This may cause many student parents to be in an uncomfortable position of either enrolling in college full time and depending on local, institutional, and federal student aid and access to parent-based programs or working full time and enrolling in community college part-time. The latter means that a student parent will be enrolled in college for a more extended period. This delicate balancing act is an essential indicator of the

economic tension and lack of safety nets that student parents must negotiate with themselves, partners, family members, and their children.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COLLEGE STAFF

There has been a national increase in private, state, and federal efforts to support student parents in higher education from multiple advocacy and philanthropic groups. A continued investment of resources, advocacy, and support systems for student parents enrolled in two-year colleges is critical as 42% of all student parents are enrolled in local community colleges across the country (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019). The increased attention has resulted in convenings, policy briefs, and state policies to improve the educational outcomes of this group.

Based on qualitative interviews with five college staff members, we learned that limited institutional financial resources and inaccurate data systems pose challenges in supporting student parents. We learned from college staff members that their institutions — with limited resources — support between 25 to more than 500+ student parents per semester with academic advising, mental health support, and other immediate basic needs relief. We also learned how these limited financial resources and staffing impact the ability to foster deep relationships between student parent initiatives by limiting their capacity for outreach, support, and promotion of resources for new and current student parents on their campuses.

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CRITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE IN CALIFORNIA

CASH ASSISTANCE

In California, CalWORKS is a public assistance program for eligible families with children in their homes. Some families receive monthly financial resources to offset costs related to housing, food, and other necessary expenses, if eligible. The monetary aid a parent is eligible for is based on several factors including age, the number of children in the home, income, assets, and region/area of residence. Many student parents use CalWORKS support while enrolled in community college. However, participants are limited to 48 months for direct cash aid, which may impact future transfer students. The fixed window may impact student parents who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree due to impacted courses or delays in access to specific academic programs. Thus, state policy regarding CalWORKS and college degree or credential attainment are misaligned. This is an area that state lawmakers can revisit to better support the educational and economic needs of students with dependents.

DATA SYSTEMS

Current statewide and federal data systems do not adequately record the number of student parents in higher education (GAO, 2019). Previous efforts to capture a precise count of student parents often depended on the use of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms. Educators and researchers often use dependent information on the FAFSA forms as a proxy for children; however, this number may be inaccurate as some college students may have guardianship over an adult parent, sibling, or other family member. Without accurate student parent enrollment, persistence, and completion data, it may be difficult for college administrators, system leaders, and policymakers to properly adjust current college policies or practices to meet their unique needs. For example, if ABC College has more than 25% student parent enrollment, what services, resources, or improved practices are required to meet the needs of those students? Will course planning or on-site child care services be available to increase course engagement and completion? Accurate student parent data is critical to better adjust campus services, teaching schedules, and budgets to the changing dynamics. The challenge to identify data for community colleges is how institutional practices and data collection efforts are reported to district or statewide data systems, as many times, the student parent label was not a system priority. There does not appear to be a uniform reporting methodology across colleges to capture student parent enrollment or degree completion. For example, if colleges are not systematically collecting similar student parents data points such as student mothers, number of children, ages of children, this could complicate the development of a targeted system-wide efforts to support student parents in higher education.

EXAMPLES OF DATA IN ACTION

Equity-focused efforts in community colleges require bold decision-making, and we suggest using institutional data to help support informed decision-making related to supporting student parents. Data will help college leaders understand enrollment and completion trends, what academic programs student parents are concentrated in, and what courses serve as gatekeepers, such as those with low pass/completion rates that derail academic success. This will help college staff anticipate future opportunities to promote academic achievements.

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COMMUNITY
COLLEGE
of AURORA

Currently, the Community College of Aurora (CO) is exploring the feasibility of updating its admissions application materials to inquire whether a new student is a parent. The admissions form would ask, "Do you identify as a student parent?" If the respondent answers "yes," the student will receive communication from college staff with tailored support to improve their transition.

LONG BEACH
CITY COLLEGE

Similarly, Long Beach City College (CA) asks new and re-enrolling students if they have experienced housing instability, require support with basic needs, and whether they are student parents. The college then uses that self-reported (student parent, former foster youth, justice-impacted, etc.) information to provide wrap-around services for students at risk of dropping out should they not have access to resources or housing.

DATA POINTS: The cost of being a community college student parent in 18 states

Average cost of a one-bedroom apartment: $1,705

Average cost of child care for one child/per month: $1,218

Average food voucher amount: $50

Average college tuition cost: $4,418 (in-state) and $9,446 (out-of-state)

24 campuses provide on-campus child care centers

15 campuses provide priority enrollment for student parents

11 campuses provide student parent orientation

19 campuses provide book vouchers for student parents (award amount varied)

14 campuses had student parent websites that were inaccurate/outdated (Based on the available information from the 37 community college campuses in 18 states)

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COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT PARENT AND STAFF MEMBERS' VOICES

PERSPECTIVES FROM COMMUNITY COLLEGE STAFF WHO WORK WITH STUDENT PARENTS

The research team spoke with five staff members of college-based student parent programs who shared their experiences supporting student parents at their institutions. We learned that campus staff clearly understand the institutional hurdles and resources available to help student parents. Although it is well documented that community colleges are underfunded and unable to meet their students' multiple social, economic, and academic demands (Sallee & Cox, 2019), the perspectives from community college staff highlight the needs specific to student parents, even at institutions where resources for student parents exist. The voices from campuses that we feature demonstrate the institutional needs of student parents and show that recognizing these needs can increase access for student parents and create opportunities for administrators to make impactful changes to policy and practice for this student group.

Some community college staff members identified a lack of campus-wide understanding and awareness of the needs of student parents. Many of the staff members stressed the daily challenges of supporting student parents due to limited capacity and resources in their programs and also data challenges to identify student parents across the community college campus. Staff members also highlight how administrators and campus leadership often cited limited financial resources as one of the biggest challenges for implementing positive change for student parents.

> **"One of the biggest challenges for our students just continues to be a resource across the board: child care here on campus." — Staff Member**

> **"I really think administrators have a disconnect with understanding, truly understanding, how hard it is to pay for child care and be a student…and then to understand…there's all these great resources but [students] don't have time to connect with them because [they're] parents…" — Staff Member**

It would be beneficial for colleges to develop roadmaps or flowcharts that staff members can use to help student parents understand what resources and support systems are available to help them navigate institutional barriers, policies, and practices.

PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENT PARENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES

As the research team engaged student parents across multiple community colleges, it became evident that student parent staff at the college-based initiatives are working tirelessly to support student parents in higher education, but required more institutional support through staffing and financial resources to scale efforts and provided individualized attention to students. In the text below, student parents identified technological assistance, emergency financial support, and policies around student support service as some of the areas of support that could be improved at their community colleges. Locally and nationally, the identified themes often serve as roadblocks for student parents to persist and complete their degrees. Student parents also made recommendations for community colleges to become more welcoming regarding child care and families.

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Technology Issues during the Global Pandemic

Student parents shared that before and during the global pandemic, they did not have a home laptop or internet so completing at-home assignments was nearly impossible. When asked about some of the biggest challenges associated with online learning, one student replied:

> **"The internet. At the beginning [of the pandemic] …the lack of technology because I had to share my computer with my kids. And then once [the school district] passed out computers to kids, and it was fine. But then the internet was slowing down [during remote learning], so that was another issue."**

Another student talked about being unaware of the technology loans and support that were provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. The student shared:

> **"I didn't know that [the college] was giving out hotspots or the internet and then computers. I had to go buy my own computer, which I put on my credit card and I'm still paying for it as of right now. And then internet, I'm barely hanging in there to pay for that because the school gives internet, but it was so slow that me and my son couldn't be on the internet at the same time."**

College-Based Program Restrictions that Impact Student Parents in California

A majority of the students we interviewed were enrolled in multiple community college-based support services programs available in California community colleges such as Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS) that supports first-generation and low-income students, Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) that helps single parents, and California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKS) that is a statewide public assistance program. Collectively, these programs provide a multitude of services and resources including academic advising, therapy, cash aid, and other benefits that enable student parents to focus on their education. While the participants noted that these programs offered financial and academic support, they also identified limitations and challenges embedded within them.

One student provided recommendations for how CARE, a program that aids single parents, could increase the number of students served. The student shared:

> **"I wish [the CARE program] was available for all parents without being in EOPS. It's a great way…for parents to connect with other parents. Because you have that support. I'm a parent, they're a parent, they're doing it, I'm doing it…Why not let CARE be available for anybody without being in EOPS. Why is there a limit to being in CARE?"**

Another student spoke about the difficulty of attending mandated counseling appointments for EOPS while being compliant with campus policies that prohibit bringing children to campus. The student urged flexibility and cooperation from the EOPS program:

> **"Well, I would say just those two things about being a little bit more lenient when it comes to student parents bringing children to counseling appointments…Again, I mean, it's a one-on-one conversation. Most of the time the stuff that they tell me is whatever we need to get done, it's not like its rocket science. She's a child, she'll sit there and watch YouTube. Tell me what you need to tell me and get it over with. Like I said, it's ridiculous for me to have to find somewhere to put her for 30 minutes and then just go get her again."**

The student parents that we interviewed expressed their frustrations with many aspects of the community college experience such as policies that prohibit student parents from attending the mandated EOPS counseling meetings with their child, being unaware of available technological assistance, or limiting the number of peer student parents eligible for support initiatives. Other student parents described their frustrating attempts to access emergency aid available through their colleges during the pandemic, which provided them, on average, $350 to $500 towards rent, bills, or increased food costs. Despite these frustrations, student parents had recommendations for community colleges to better meet their needs such as dedicated parent study rooms, lactation centers, diaper changing tables in men and women's bathrooms, student parent housing, peer parent support groups, etc.

Family Friendly Spaces on College Campuses

One student suggested that a parent or family room be located on campus to remain accessible to student parents and their children:

> **"I would say a parent room. What if you're a parent, obviously, you could go there and take your kids while you study. Or you have a study group or something. So, I think that would be a great addition to [my community college], because there's a lot of student parents at [my community college]."**

Student parents identified the need for establishing a physical space on campus that worked for them and their families. Other students mentioned how faculty and staff need to work toward creating safe spaces for student parents through affirming practices instead of demeaning parenthood for college students. For example, students mentioned how colleges could create safe spaces by being empathetic to the unique challenges of student parents, allowing their children to be on campus, giving grace to a student parent for submitting late assignments, or being patient with a student who brings a child to class due to unplanned child care changes.

Throughout the interviews, student parents highlighted that college leadership should be better attuned to the needs of student parents. Their quotes reveal the range of issues that they would like to see addressed, from classroom practices to support systems on college campuses that have not fully accounted for the needs of student parents. Access to college childcare centers can be difficult for student parents as the high cost and (for most) years-long waiting list impact students. Often, community colleges will evaluate retention rates, course completion patterns, or the use of basic-need services as a barometer of student engagement and success. We recommend that they also consider using focus groups to reflect student parents' immediate needs and concerns as well as to hear about their frustrations, success stories, and opportunities so that they can pivot to support service delivery.

Guided Questions for Campus Staff and Leadership

CAMPUS-LEVEL SUPPORTS:

☐ How can enrollment management and institutional research offices work together to capture an accurate number of student parents on my campus?

☐ How can I engage recent student parent alumni for a parent panel on strategies for college success?

☐ Who can help secure local, state, or federal grants or gifts to invest more resources for on-campus or local childcare support for student parents at my institution?

☐ What is the process to hire student parent peer-mentors as work-study students to serve as recruiters and retention support systems for new student parents?

STUDENT-LEVEL SUPPORTS:

☐ How can you engage recent student-parent alumni to participate in a panel to help current students learn best practices to succeed in community college?

☐ What is the process for hiring currently-enrolled parents to serve as peer-mentors or work-study students to serve as recruiters and to create retention support systems for new student parents on college campuses?

☐ How can student parents provide on-going feedback to campus leaders about their evolving challenges?

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EXAMPLES OF HOW COMMUNITY COLLEGES ARE ENGAGING STUDENT PARENTS

SAMPLE OF 5 CAMPUS PROGRAMS				
SITE	**TYPES OF RESOURCES AN SUPPORTS FOR STUDENT PARENTS**	**APPLICATION NEEDED TO ACCESS SERVICES**	**ESTIMATED # OF STUDENT PARENTS SERVED**	**AVAILABILITY OF ON-CAMPUS CHILD CARE SERVICES**
Glendale City College (CA)	Cash grant and expense reimbursement	Yes	~565 student parents per academic year	On-campus child care and local partnerships with Dept. of Public Social Services
Clark State College (OH)	Books, transportation and food	Yes	~500 student parents served in Fall 2021	On-campus child care services
Houston Community College (TX)	Books, transportation and technology	No	Unknown	On-campus child care services
Oklahoma City College (OK)	Books, gas card + TAP card (transit) and groceries	No	118 students received benefits in Fall 2021	Partnerships with county through referral process
Fresno City College (CA)	Flat rate checks, technology and pantry partnership	Yes	456 students served during the 2021-2022 academic year	Partnerships with county by providing child care

Our research indicates that currently, there is no singular model or standard practice to support student parents across community colleges. Granted, each community college has access to various local and state funding models that influenced resource availability and the culture of support at their institution. However, we encourage the use of baseline best practices such as food and book vouchers, technology loaners including hotspots and laptops, building relationships with licensed childcare centers, and local social service providers. Each college, community college district, or state allows wide latitude on how to help student parents, but as noted, more work needs to be done to support student parents to earn college degrees or certificates. As highlighted in the above table, colleges may offer book vouchers, transportation services (i.e., gas cards, bus passes), technology grants/loaners, cash aid, or some housing support services. Gaining access to on-campus student parent services can range from formal applications to referrals for "drop-in" support from local social services agencies. It is also important to mention that some community colleges limit the number of student parents eligible to receive benefits on the local campus, which can impact their enrollment, persistence, and eventual graduation. It is necessary to alter eligibility requirements for access to support services for some student parents who may be returning to higher education after a long absence due to child care duties or work responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAMPUS STAFF AND LEADERSHIP

At every community college across the country, there is a pressing need to support the various needs of all students regardless if they are social, academic, emotional, or basic in nature. Student parents may require support in multiple areas (e.g., therapy, housing, child care, cash aid, etc.), requiring a holistic and "wrap around service" ethos to assist their progression and persistence in community college. Based on the interviews with student parents and college staff who serve student parents, we provide the following recommendations for campus leadership and staff members who seek to better support student parents in community college:

• ACCESS TO ACCURATE INFORMATION (IN PERSON AND WEB-BASED)

Challenge: Student parents experience "time poverty." This systematic problem poses severe challenges for student parents, as they do not have sufficient time to visit numerous offices for resources or benefits, or at times are sent to multiple offices and receive inaccurate information (Huerta et al., 2022). In addition, many student parents we interviewed shared there was a "lack of urgency" and "compassion" from staff when they inquired about basic college information and the amount of time required to resolve problems on campus. Furthermore, we found that many student parent resource websites had outdated intake applications that were not accessible; websites did not provide complete information about book vouchers, transportation grants, or other services.

Recommendations: We strongly encourage staff and administrators to engage in a type of emphatical communication with student parents. Moreover, to expand access to support services, student workers or student parents can serve as ambassadors to provide peer mentoring through chat, telephone, or video conference software. Using student parent ambassadors can alleviate staff/administrators' communication barriers and increase the engagement available for new student parents who may be anxious about their transition into higher education and unsure how to access support.

Ask Academic Senate/Faculty Councils to encourage faculty members to include information about student parent resources on course syllabi. Integrating resources into course syllabi could reduce the social stigma that many student parents experience in higher education (Estes, 2011).

• STREAMLINING ACCESS TO CAMPUS-BASED RESOURCES

Child Care:
Challenge: Long waitlists for on-campus child care impacted student parents' ability to secure stable and affordable child care. This, in turn, impacts their ability to enroll in more credit hours per semester. Some parents that we interviewed commented that there was more than a one-year wait to gain access to on-campus child care services. They instead had to depend on family members or private (and expensive) (un)licensed child care options in their local community that caused them to have to seek additional income to afford college enrollment and child care expenses at the same time.

Recommendations: As many community colleges consider the benefits of childcare centers or other child care resources, it is crucial to monitor the waitlist. If campus-based child care waitlists are long, community colleges are encouraged to explore local partnerships with third-party providers to alleviate this concern.

Building Community:

Challenge: Many student parents shared feeling isolated and socially stigmatized at their college due to being pregnant or having dependents.

Recommendations: Many of the recommendations for building a social community for student parents are low-cost efforts that can serve their unique, multifaceted needs, and allow their children to begin seeing higher education as a natural progression in their lives.

1. Create a community for student parents; the development of peer networks and support groups are essential for mutual understanding and friendship. Peer networks could also allow parents to exchange children's clothing at lower costs for parents. Having peers who share similarly-lived experiences is vital to fostering a sense of belonging.

2. Offer parenting workshops to help them learn about campus-based resources and local/state support services that can enhance their college experiences and reduce the cost of living.

3. Establish spaces on campus where student parents can both study and engage their children in developmental activities. For example, dedicating a room or location within the campus library for student parents to study and build community with an area for their children is helpful for multigenerational learning and support.

4. Organize family-specific programs such as family movie nights, family resource fairs, and similar efforts to expand and foster an inclusive space for student parents.

5. Design workshops for student parents to learn how to navigate higher education including building relationships with faculty, learning how to be a self-advocate for resources, course planning, study skills, and related topics.

• USE OF INSTITUTIONAL DATA

Challenge: In conducting equity-focused work to support student parent retention and persistence in community colleges, knowing how many student parents currently enrolled in your institution is critical. Administrators, faculty, practitioners, and classified staff often provide inaccurate estimates, often a guess, of the total number of student parents enrolled in their institution. This practice contradicts an evidence-based strategy.

Recommendations: Institutional research, childcare center leadership, enrollment management, and student affairs must collaborate to create tools to reflect enrollment numbers by academic term. This could mean that once students enroll in new courses, they must complete a short demographic profile that gathers information on housing status, the number of children under the age of 18 in their household, food security, and involvement in on-campus services. This can provide immediate information on the total number of student parents enrolled for a specific academic term. The college can nudge those students to register in campus-based resources or connect students to local support services that can aid in housing, food, or child care.

CONCLUSION

Community colleges are tasked with a multitude of goals to improve the lives of college students. Community colleges have not adjusted their means of collecting accurate data points about persistence, retention, or degree completion to improve educational outcomes for student parents, specifically. This report builds on the efforts by various practitioners, administrators, and other invested groups across the country that center the needs of student parents in higher education.

We found that many community colleges provide access to book vouchers, residential housing placement or access to referrals, drop-in child care, parenting workshops, and other opportunities that enable student parents to persist and graduate from their community college. Unfortunately, inaccurate information, such as incomplete listings of available resources for student parents in community colleges, may hinder their ability to know what benefits they were entitled to use at their local institution.

We encourage community colleges to become leaders in supporting student parents' educational journeys by examining the holistic needs of the individual college student and their dependents so that they can earn a college degree and move forward with their lives. We urge community college leaders to anticipate the next set of emerging needs and ask what's next to better support student parents in higher education. We encourage community colleges to gradually align multiple campus resources to bundle support services to empower student parents, and determine whether student parent initiatives adequately funded and staffed to influence persistence and degree completion.

Lastly, community colleges should use case management methods to support and locate resources to help student parents complete each academic term or goal. This will result in elevating the individual student as well as potentially changing their children's familial trajectory.

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