



GREATER TEXAS  
FOUNDATION

# ISSUE BRIEF: STUDENT PARENTS

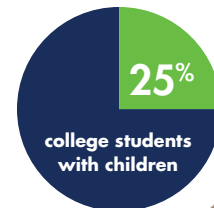
Research conducted by: Tessa Pennington

## OVERVIEW

The increasing number of parents seeking a postsecondary education in recent years is transforming what has been considered a non-traditional interest group into a robust student population. **According to recent data, about 25 percent of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions have children.**<sup>1</sup>

Despite their growing strength in number, however, student parents continue to face unique obstacles that prevent them from attaining credentials at rates comparable to their childless peers.<sup>2</sup> Student parents' educational outcomes are not only important for the students themselves, but also have a significant impact on their children and communities.<sup>3</sup>

This brief describes characteristics and challenges of the student parents population and concludes with research-informed recommendations to increase support for this critical demographic.



### Here are some characteristics of this diverse population of students:

- **Female:** Almost a third of the nation's female student population are parents, compared to only 18 percent of the male student population.<sup>4</sup> In Texas, 72 percent of students with children are women.<sup>5</sup> The majority of student mothers are raising their children on their own, and 43 percent of the entire student parent population are single mothers.<sup>6</sup>
- **Students of Color:** A greater share of students of color are raising children compared to white students. Almost half of all undergraduate female students of color have children at home, compared to 29 percent of white women.<sup>7</sup>
- **Full-Time Employees:** Student parents are much more likely than their peers without children to be working full-time. Almost 50 percent of students with children are employed full-time compared to 22 percent of students without children.<sup>8</sup>
- **Part-Time Students:** Many student parents attend school part-time – a characteristic which disqualifies them from some forms of financial aid.<sup>9</sup>
- **Low-Income:** 57 percent of student parents are classified as low-income.<sup>10</sup> That figure is even higher for single mothers at 89 percent being classified as low-income.<sup>11</sup>
- **First-Generation:** Many student parents are the first person in their immediate family to pursue a postsecondary education.<sup>12</sup>
- **Attending Community College:** Student parents are more likely to be enrolled at community colleges than at four-year universities.<sup>13</sup>
- **Less Prepared Academically:** On average, students with children enter postsecondary education with lower test scores and are placed in remedial courses at higher rates than their peers without children.<sup>14</sup>

# CHALLENGES STUDENT PARENTS FACE

**On average, student parents have poorer postsecondary outcomes than students who do not have children. They are much less likely to graduate within six years of initial enrollment, and they tend to accumulate credits at a slower rate.<sup>15</sup> There are three overarching barriers that contribute to these outcomes: lack of sufficient money, time, and childcare.**

## **MONEY**

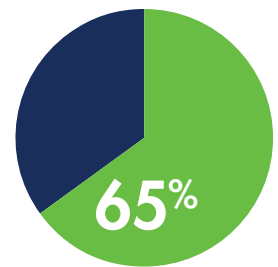
Student parents are much more likely to be poor than students who do not have children. As a result, they are often unable to meet the financial obligations of being a student. This is particularly the case for single parents. A research study found that even for students who receive financial assistance, single student parents have an average unmet need of \$5,507 per year.<sup>16</sup>



**Single student parents have an average unmet need of \$5,507 per year.**

## **TIME**

Student parents have less discretionary time available to them than students without children, and the free time they do have is often of a poorer quality than that of other students.<sup>17</sup> One report found that student parents with pre-school aged children only had an average of 10 hours per day to spend on schoolwork, sleeping, eating, and leisure compared to students with no children who had an average of 21 hours per day.<sup>18</sup> In a survey of student parents, 65 percent of respondents indicated that they had missed class to take care of their children.<sup>19</sup> The time burden of having children is particularly pronounced for mothers, who generally report spending more hours caring for their children than fathers do.<sup>20</sup> Without the available time to dedicate to school work, students with children often struggle to meet the academic demands of postsecondary education.



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## **CHILDCARE**

Student parents struggle to find access to affordable childcare, particularly on campus. The share of postsecondary institutions offering on-campus childcare has been on the decline in recent years, particularly at community colleges, where the majority of student parents are attending.<sup>21</sup> Even for campuses that do provide childcare, most have prohibitively long waitlists.<sup>22</sup> Parents with children under the age of two have a particularly difficult time finding access to care because many on-site facilities do not care for infants.<sup>23</sup> It is estimated that on-campus childcare facilities across the country only serve five percent of the children in need.<sup>24</sup>



**On-campus childcare facilities only serve 5% of the children in need.**

Beyond merely finding an adequate location for childcare, many student parents have trouble finding affordable options. Even for those lucky enough to access on-campus care, many may not have access to federal aid due to a stagnation in funding for campus childcare.<sup>25</sup> A report found that in a majority of states across the country, the annual cost of childcare was more expensive than tuition at a 4-year public university.<sup>26</sup> Given the vulnerable financial situation many student parents are in, the cost of childcare is untenable.

# RESEARCH-INFORMED RECOMMENDATIONS

Although student parents face a host of unique challenges to completing a postsecondary credential, there are several steps both government and institutions of higher education can take to support these students and help them succeed.

## Federal Government

- Revise the FAFSA<sup>27</sup>
  - Include questions about number of children and their ages on the application
  - Increase funding available to part-time students

## Institutions of Higher Education

- Create systems that are aware of student parents' needs by training and hiring staff to be sensitive and offering flexible scheduling<sup>28</sup>
- Collect and track data on student parents and their educational outcomes<sup>29</sup>
- Provide affordable childcare options<sup>30</sup>
- Provide financial assistance for non-tuition related costs such as housing, healthcare, food, and textbooks<sup>31</sup>
- Provide students with counseling, social services, and financial literacy programs<sup>32</sup>
- Provide students with academic support<sup>33</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." Young Invincibles. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Baumhardt, Alex and Emily Hanford. 2018. "Nearly 1 in 5 female college students are single moms." 15 January. APMreports. <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2018/01/15/single-mothers-college-graduation>

<sup>4</sup> Wladis, Claire, Alyse C. Hachey and Katherine Conway. 2018. "No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood." 16 February. The Journal of Higher Education. Vol. 89, no. 6. 807-831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.14421983>

<sup>5</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." Young Invincibles. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Eckerson, Elanor, Lauren Talbourdet, Lindsey Reichlin, Mary Sykes, Elizabeth Noll, and Barbara Gault. 2016. "Child Care for Parents in College: A State-by-State Assessment." September. Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/publications/child-care-for-parents-in-college-a-state-by-state-assessment/>

<sup>7</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." Young Invincibles. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

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<sup>8</sup> Miller, Kevin, Barbara Gault and Abby Thorman. 2011. "Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success Among Low-Income Parents." Student Parent Success Initiative and Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/wpallimport/files/iwpr-export/publications/C378.pdf>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Eckerson, Elanor, Lauren Talbourdet, Lindsey Reichlin, Mary Sykes, Elizabeth Noll, and Barbara Gault. 2016. "Child Care for Parents in College: A State-by-State Assessment." September. Institute for Women's Policy Research. <https://iwpr.org/publications/child-care-for-parents-in-college-a-state-by-state-assessment/>

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<sup>14</sup> Wladis, Claire, Alyse C. Hachey and Katherine Conway. 2018. "No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood." 16 February. *The Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. 89, no. 6, 807-831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.14421983>

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<sup>15</sup> Kruevelis, Melanie. 2017. "Building Family-Friendly Campuses: Strategies to Promote College Success Among Student Parents." 12 June. *Higher Education Today: A blog by ACE*. <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2017/06/12/building-family-friendly-campuses-strategies-promote-college-success-among-student-parents/>

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<sup>18</sup> Whitford, Emma. 2018. "'Time Poverty' of Students Who Are Parents." 2 October. *Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/10/02/student-parents-complete-degrees-more-slowly-drop-out-due-time-poverty>.

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<sup>21</sup> Gault, Barbara, Lindsey Reichlin, Elizabeth Reynolds, and Meghan Froehner. 2014. "Campus Child Care Declining Even As Growing Numbers of Parents Attend College." Institute for Women's Policy Research. 17 November. <https://iwpr.org/publications/campus-child-care-declining-even-as-growing-numbers-of-parents-attend-college/>.

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<sup>22</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." *Young Invincibles*. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

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<sup>24</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." *Young Invincibles*. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Wladis, Claire, Alyse C. Hachey and Katherine Conway. 2018. "No Time for College? An Investigation of Time Poverty and Parenthood." 16 February. *The Journal of Higher Education*. Vol. 89, no. 6, 807-831. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.14421983>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Galasso, Fedora, Aurora Harris and Emily Sasser-Bray. "Student Parents and Health Care in Texas: Understanding and Elevating their Needs." *Young Invincibles*. [https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI\\_TX\\_studentparents.pdf](https://younginvincibles.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/YI_TX_studentparents.pdf)

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.