

TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES FOR POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS

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“It’s a slow progression through school, but I’m eager to get my degree and get a job so I can be financially empowered for my family and for my kids.”

– Ariel Ventura-Lazo, George Mason University student and Northern Virginia Community College graduate

With more than 99 percent of the jobs added since January 2010 going to workers with at least some level of college education, the pursuit of higher education has never been more important.¹ Research shows that parents who complete a college degree can double their incomes,² and just a \$3,000 increase in income for parents with young children can translate to a 20 percent increase in their children’s future earnings.³ Today, 26 percent of undergraduates are student parents. Ninety-three percent of teen students with children do not complete degrees or certification within six years. A new approach to systems and programming can help postsecondary institutions keep pace with the changing needs of their students.

Ascend at the Aspen Institute promotes a two-generation approach (2Gen) as a powerful means to champion families as they work to break the cycle intergenerational poverty. This approach emphasizes whole-family strategies at the community, state, and federal level and promotes the importance of education,

parental and economic supports, social capital, and access to quality healthcare for both children and their adult caregivers together.

As postsecondary institutions explore more comprehensive 2Gen programming, identifying student parents and the challenges they face is the first step. This data informs support systems and programming, ranging from Family Resource Centers that offer whole-family healthcare, mental health, childcare, and other benefits eligibility access, to low-cost supports like coaching in financial aid and academics. Flexible class and childcare schedules, evening programming, online course opportunities, and summer programming for both parent and child all support better student parent outcomes. Broader partnerships with human services agencies, philanthropic organizations, local schools, and early childcare providers help create wraparound services that enable busy students to balance their home and academic responsibilities and persist in their studies.

Incorporating a 2Gen or whole-family approach into higher education institutions means building a family-friendly campus culture with processes, policies, and support systems in place that meet the needs of all students. Here are a few tips for getting started.

WHAT INSTITUTIONS NEED TO KNOW

Implementing a 2Gen approach that meets the needs of student parents starts with learning more about the student parents already on campus.

- **Know the Numbers.** Including questions such as “Are you a parent?” or “How many dependent children do you have?” into admission forms, conducting student surveys, and using existing data from sources such as the Free Application for Federal Student Aid helps administrators identify critical needs and opportunities for student parents.
- **Review Policies and Programs that Impact Student Families.** Local, state, and federal policies and programs may cause unintentional barriers for student parents. Understanding how programs like SNAP and TANF are administered can help pinpoint these issues.
- **Identify the Institutional Gaps.** Each college and campus operates in a different geographical, social, and political context. Surveys and focus groups will help administrators identify and address the most pertinent needs of students with families on their campuses.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Once postsecondary institutions understand the student parent experience, implementing practical services and supports will help more student parents reach graduation. These strategies in particular offer low-cost, high-yield results.

- **Target and highlight services and supports for student parents.** Nearly 70 percent of two-year college students with dependents live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. That number grows to 88 percent for single parent students.⁴ Workshops to help these students navigate financial aid, benefits, or the college experience provide explicit and much-needed resources. Likewise, outreach that directly targets student parents and the staff who work with them can quickly connect student parents to supports and services already available on campus, such as academic coaching or benefits eligibility assistance.
- **Connect with student parents on campus.** Students raising children often feel like they are alone on campus. Low-cost services such as peer advising, student parent study groups, child care circles, academic coaching, and opportunities for students to connect with each other build on-campus networks that help students stay connected and increase their likelihood of persistence and success. Conducting student surveys, listening to family voices, and fostering

parent leadership on campus also helps build programming for students.

- **Establish partnerships.** Student families with low incomes benefit from easy access to wraparound or bundled services such as career coaching, mental health services, public benefits access and navigation, and affordable reserved child care. Postsecondary education institutions can support student parents by partnering with local school systems, early childhood education providers, and human services agencies. These relationships can also help address unintentional barriers, create opportunities to better track outcomes, and improve data collection to enhance the work of all partners involved.

Community colleges around the nation are leading the way to a more intentionally inclusive environment by piloting replicable programs and strategies that can improve whole-family outcomes. For additional tips and resources on creating a 2Gen whole-family approach that meets the needs of all students, visit the Higher Education/Workforce section of our 2Gen Toolbox at ascend.aspeninstitute.org/resources/2Gen-toolbox.

The Keys to Degrees Program at Endicott College in Massachusetts is a campus-based program serving single parents and their young children (six years or younger at admission). Families share four-bedroom dormitory suites with another family, and all parents are enrolled in a “career-minded major,” full-time, year-round, while their children attend a high-quality child development program or elementary school. Additional services for parents include scholarships; one-on-one tutoring; counseling; life-skills classes; and full-time, semester-long internships, which often lead to jobs. Based on a decade of data, 71 percent of students have completed college in just four years (versus 40 percent of parenting students nationally who complete degrees or certificates in six years). Alumni surveys indicate 100 percent of Keys to Degrees graduates are employed (86 percent in jobs related to their career field of study), 57 percent earn an annual salary of \$40,000 or more, and 100 percent are not receiving any public support, among other outcomes.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, *America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots*, 2016
- ² Julian, T. & Kominski, R. (2011, September). *Education and Synthetic Work-Life Earnings Estimates: American community survey reports*. Retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau website: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/acs-14.pdf>
- ³ Duncan, G. & Magnuson, K. (2011). The long reach of early childhood poverty. *Pathways Magazine (Winter 2011)*. Stanford, CA: The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality.
- ⁴ Gault, B., Noll, E & Reichlin, L. (2017) *The Family-Friendly Campus Imperative: Supporting Success Among Community College Students with Children*. Association of Community College Trustees.