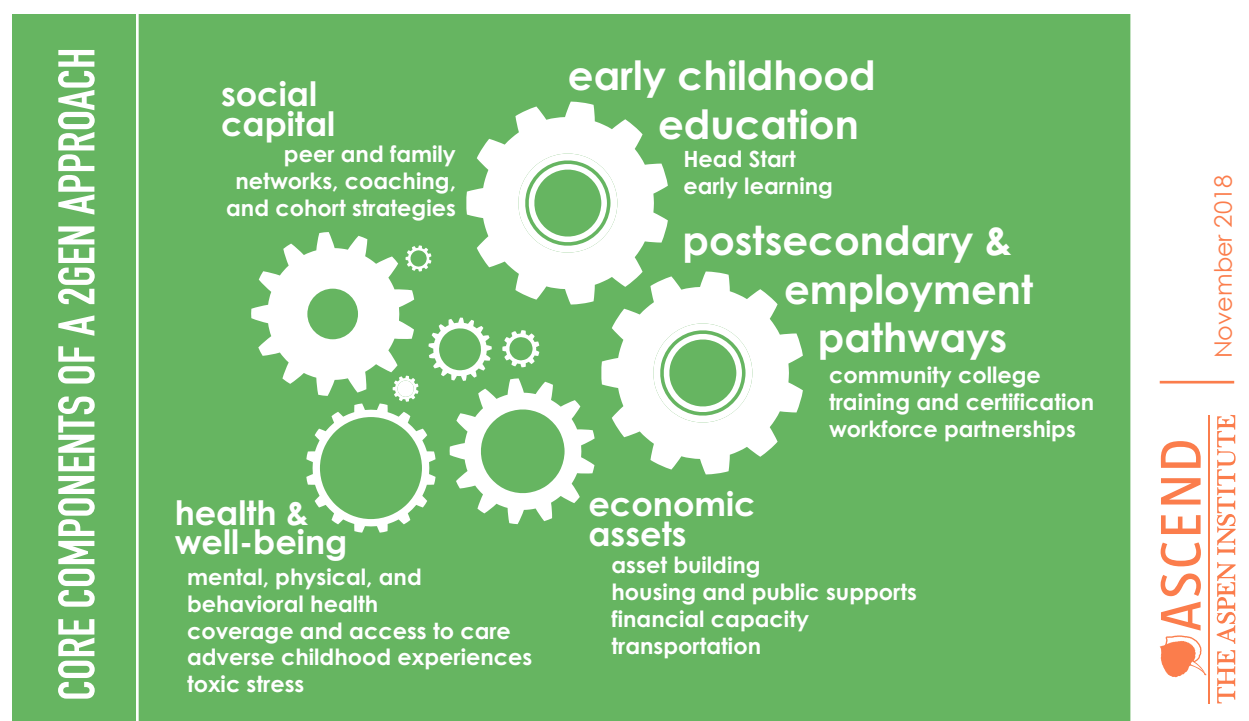


Accelerating POSTSECONDARY SUCCESS for PARENTS Leveraging the Two-Generation Approach in Policy

Introduction and Context

Parents know what researchers have documented: Education, especially postsecondary education, is the most promising path toward economic stability for families because it can lead to jobs and careers with living wages. Research has shown the impact of a parent's education, economic stability, and overall health on a child's well-being (Dubow, Boxer, & Husemann, 2009; Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010). Similarly, children's education and healthy development are powerful catalysts for parents. Two-generational approaches create opportunities for and address needs of both children and the adults in their lives together and build on the power of this mutual motivation. That is why postsecondary education is a core component of the 2Gen approach, which meets the needs of parents with low incomes and their children simultaneously, supporting families in making progress together.

Why are postsecondary students who are parents deserving of specific attention? Parents are resilient, have mutual motivation to succeed, but have major constraints on time. A recent study published in the *Journal of Higher Education* discusses the "time poverty" that students who are parents face (Wladis, Hachey, & Conway, 2018). According to the study, students who were raising preschool-age children had about



My biggest fear is that I won't be able to break all the curses against me for my children.

—Rynn Bell, Parent Advisor

10 hours per day to dedicate to academics, sleeping, eating, and leisure activities, compared to the 21 hours available for childless students. Unsurprisingly, child care requires significant time and

resources. Education consultant Entangled Solutions recently released *Parent Learners: Insights for Innovation*, a report that found that time was “shredded” for students who are parents (Horn, Salisbury, Ashburn, Schiener, & Pizer, 2018). In addition to time pressures, students who are parents must often address challenges with affordable child care, stable housing, finances, institutional racism, and trauma. Parents deserve access to resources and opportunities that can address their financial and time constraints as well as other challenges to allow them to better themselves and improve the economic trajectory of their families.

Aspen Postsecondary Success for Parents Initiative

In 2018, Ascend deepened its work on postsecondary success for parents to identify and develop solutions, political will, and leadership to accelerate the economic and educational success of students who are parents. The work taps leaders from Ascend national Ascend Fellowship, the more than 270 organizations in the Ascend Network, and the strength and expertise of parents. Ascend is energized and grateful for the partnership of Omidyar Network to target research and development to help build the field and a portfolio of solutions for students who are parents.

In partnership with Omidyar Network, Ascend is committed to:

- Promoting a deeper understanding across practice, policy, and research of the opportunities, barriers, and challenges for students who are parents;
- Creating a framework for parent-powered solutions and engagement; and
- Developing a model for philanthropy to authentically engage parent voice led by a group of Parent Advisors, who are current and former postsecondary students.

This brief, along with a complementary brief on practice, is the first in a series that highlights lessons and recommendations from leaders, including parents, in the field.

Recommendations for Federal and State Postsecondary Leaders

There are opportunities for federal and state policies to better support postsecondary institutions in serving students who are parents and their families. Policymakers can incentivize partnerships, name students who are parents as special or target populations, and facilitate financial aid processes that address the needs of families. Where possible, policies can also encourage creative and innovative approaches to leveraging existing programs to facilitate access and successful completion for parenting students. These recommendations seek to promote policy changes that

address the critical supports students raising children and their families need for successful completion: affordable and quality child care, financial aid, wraparound services, and workforce readiness.

Support Holistic Programs for Students who are Parents

Provide financial resources for whole-family services on campus. Students who are parents are a valuable population with intrinsic motivation to better themselves; if offered high-quality holistic supports, they will succeed. For students raising children, awareness of and access to resources could mean the difference between stopping school to work or continuing their studies. There are several ways in which specific policy guidance, modifications, or implementation at the federal and state levels can allow for greater flexibility in the use of financial supports to strengthen work and educational supports through whole-family services. Existing and recent laws reflect the importance and value of these supports. For example, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) allows support for parents who are in postsecondary programs to include high-quality early care and education and access to other public benefits, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (Spaulding, 2015). Per the goals of the Working Families Success Network (2013), a policy environment is needed for students who are parents “where bundled and integrated services are the accepted best practice, enabling families to access services through many different programs and avenues.”

Practical Strategies:

- Modify eligibility for Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) assistance to allow full-time student status to meet mandated work requirements. Doing so will allow students who are parents to better balance their time and obligations to college and family while reducing barriers to child care that can derail student parent success. Currently, 11 states have work requirements for students to be eligible for CCDBG assistance, and 33 states put limits on the types of degrees and length of study. These limits do not account for the reality of students raising children, who often struggle to meet work hours requirements on top of time spent on academic studies and parenting.
- Reconsider academic limits and consider eligibility for online or distance education. Students who are parents should be able to access flexible education options and still qualify for federal and state supports.

The Los Angeles Valley College (LAVC) Family Resource Center * (FRC) (<http://lavcfamilyresourcecenter.org>) is an award-winning model of a public-private partnership—and the first and only family resource center on a community college campus in California. The FRC reduces barriers to higher education and jobs through a two-generation approach. The center provides educational and economic mobility support services to the more than 30 percent of students on campus who have young children and provides quality early child care. Since 2000, the FRC has provided family support services that include mental health counseling, drop-in child care, child-friendly study lounges, tutoring, infant-toddler

playgroups, parenting classes, academic counseling, school supplies, textbook support, baby supplies, career-readiness and stress reduction workshops, a food pantry, and social services referrals. Within the last few years, LAVC FRC was awarded a WIOA grant to also provide wraparound services to workforce training participants.

Provide access to affordable high-quality child care, on and off campus. On-campus child care centers are a popular gathering place for students who are parents. They provide a place to build community and offer other family services, but their reach is limited. A 2016 survey found that 95 percent of centers at two- and four-year schools across the country maintained a waiting list with an average of 82 children (Eckerson, Talbourdet, Reichlin, Sykes, Noll, & Gault, 2016). However, providers can get additional funding to create new child care slots through programs like Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS), which is a federal program that funds on-campus child care services for student parents who are low income. (Awards through fiscal year 2017 are listed at <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/campisp/awards.html>.) Although funding for the program has remained constant at a relatively low level of around \$15 million from its initiation in the late 1990s through recent years, CCAMPIS funding was increased to \$50 million per year in 2018. While this increase is substantial, it still does not sufficiently address the national need for campus-based child care. Legislators and policymakers who recognize the vital nature of this program should seek to protect the program at current funding levels and advocate for additional funding when possible.

CCDBG authorized the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), which is the primary source of federal funding for child care subsidies for working families who are low income and funds to improve child care quality. States should align eligibility criteria with “family friendly” policies, as defined by [National Center on Subsidy Innovation and Accountability](#). These are policies that “promote continuity, such as lengthening eligibility periods and allowing a child to remain eligible between redetermination periods...” (Early Childhood National Centers, 2018). For example, Georgia is leveraging new CCDBG discretionary funding to increase access to quality child care and to promote continuity of care by allowing each credit hour (or hour of online or in-person coursework) for GED, vocational training, and associate degree programs to count as two hours of state-approved activity; this accounts for study time (Childcare and Parent Services, 2016). Innovative policy changes like this not only acknowledge the time and commitment of parenting students, but also support their efforts to create a better life for their families.

Practical Strategies:

- Include time for transportation and study/class preparation time in child care allotments. Many states limit college students' access to child care assistance and exclude associative costs like time. Several state subsidy programs funded by CCDBG have strict eligibility rules that can require students to work at least 20 hours per week, leaving fewer hours for educational activities (Eckerson et al., 2016). This time constraint should be acknowledged and accounted for in child care allotments.
- Increase flexible child care options (e.g., drop-in, part-time). In addition to full-time child care provisions, flexible child care options are important in supporting students who are parents.

- Prioritize on-campus affordable child care for students who are parents; some colleges offer campus child care options with spots open primarily for faculty and staff.

Lansing Community College* (LCC) (<https://www.lcc.edu/services/community-campus-resources/on-campus-child-care/index.html>) in Michigan uses CCAMPIS funding to support eligible student parents who are low income with access to high-quality child care. In addition to on-campus child care, LCC partners with off-campus child care providers to provide convenient and affordable options. LCC leverages the CCAMPIS program and its location on campus to provide student parents with benefits eligibility screening, customized academic coaching, and opportunities to connect with one another. LCC also engages in advocacy and awareness building around CCAMPIS and similar state and federal subsidies that help student parents stay and succeed in school.

Expand financial aid policies to better account for the needs of students raising children and their families.

Across the nation, financial aid is a crucial tool in ensuring the affordability and access to postsecondary education for students from all backgrounds. For student parents who are low income, financial aid represents the only doorway to higher education and career training. For example, students who are parents are more likely to qualify for the Pell Grant than non-parent groups. Students who are parents are nearly 50 percent more likely than their financially independent childless peers to have an expected family contribution, or EFC, of \$0 — 61 percent compared with 41 percent, respectively (Noll, Reichlin, & Gault, 2017).

It shouldn't be so difficult. It shouldn't be intimidating to apply or look for resources to uplift your family.

—Ariel Ventura-Lazo, Parent Advisor

Practical Strategies:

Examine and modify financial aid eligibility to allow funds to more accurately meet student and family needs:

- Consider negative EFCs for students who are low income. Negative EFCs would allow colleges to target scarce aid to those students with the most financial need.
- Increase the income protection allowance so that students who earn more money as they gain certifications or training do not experience the cliff effect.
- Reinstate Pell eligibility for incarcerated students — 52 percent of state inmates and 63 percent of people in federal prison are parents (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

Reassess work-study for students who are parents:

- Institutions might consider recouping unclaimed work-study dollars to support student parent child care and career development opportunities.
- Consider how work-study funds can be used to leverage access to public benefits for students who are parents.

- Offer work-study jobs that provide career development and income with the flexibility that students need for college success. Students want to use their work-study opportunities to gain valuable “marketable skills that are not advanced by working at campus gyms and libraries” (O’Sullivan & Setzer, 2014).

Explore consumer protection policies that examine and eliminate the predatory practices of for-profit schools that often target students who are parents. This can include:

- Mandatory warning statement that reflects institutional completion rates and risk of high debt accrual.
- More intentional marketing strategies by nonprofit institutions to target and recruit prospective students who are parents.

Improve Workforce Development Opportunities and Empower Parents to Make Decision Regarding Their Families’ Well-Being

Allow for blending and braiding of federal and/or state funds to incentivize cross-sector partnerships and two-generation approaches in postsecondary education and workforce development. Eligibility rules and work requirements for public benefit systems should not work against postsecondary access and success. However, organizations supporting public benefits often lack clear incentives to collaborate with community stakeholders to support student parents who are low income and sometimes they face obstacles in doing so. For example, TANF or SNAP work requirements can limit the amount of time parents have for studying, attending classes and educational activities, and parenting. Increased persistence and completion can be achieved by allowing full-time status to count toward work requirements or by reserving on-campus employment opportunities specifically for students who are parents.

The Department of Labor’s 2016 [Strengthening Working Families Initiative](#) is a \$54.4 million grant program awarded to 14 grantees over four years that supports public-private partnerships that help working families succeed. The public-private partnerships include workforce development entities, education and training providers, business entities, and child care and education and training providers in cities across the U.S. A fundamental goal of the initiative is to reduce barriers to child care for working parents. The program design requires collaboration between higher education, workforce development, employers, and child care systems to provide career advancement opportunities for parents, while ensuring access to high-quality care and learning environments for their children.

The [Community College of Aurora](#)* in Colorado received \$3.8 million in funding for its Access to Success: Expanding Access to Education + Child Care = Economic Success initiative. The partnership includes eight organizations, including Colorado-based academic institutions, workforce development programs, and early childhood agencies such as the Community College of Denver, Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, and the Denver Office of

Economic Development. The initiative helps custodial parents, legal guardians, and foster parents obtain entry-level jobs in high-demand career pathways in health care, information technology, and advanced manufacturing. This initiative promotes many unique system- and program-level activities, including a child care navigator to address the child care needs of community college students, achievement coaches and job specialists to ensure student success in job training and placement, and development of a return-on-investment model to encourage employers' efforts to increase quality child care options.

Practical Strategy:

- Encourage states to use TANF Title IV-E waivers to allow greater flexibility in responding to the needs of students who are parents and their families. Title IV-E waivers allow states to use TANF funds to test innovative approaches in serving eligible families and have been used to bolster programs and resources in communities and on campuses (e.g., Central New Mexico Community College uses the waiver to co-locate its workforce and academic services and coaches).

Integrate language and modify guidance within current policies to name students who are parents as special or target populations, allow coursework to count toward benefits eligibility, and incentivize better data collection. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) aims to remove barriers that prevent students who are parents from accomplishing their goals. By expanding the definition of work supports to include child care and other family services, workforce development programs and postsecondary institutions can provide students who are parents with the targeted support they need. However, there remains a need for clearer definitions and intentional resources allotted for students in classes and career training who are raising young children.

Practical Strategies:

- Help postsecondary institutions and community organizations access grants that provide federal TRIO programs, which are services targeted to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Under the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, students who are parents are named as target population for these programs.
- Leverage Housing and Urban Development (HUD) affordable housing vouchers for family housing for students who are parents and provide incentives to developers through tax credits and public-private partnerships. Examples include the Community College Housing Assistance program in Tacoma, Washington (<https://www.tacomahousing.net/content/tacoma-community-college-housing-assistance-program>), a partnership between the Tacoma Housing Authority and Tacoma Community College.
- Encourage colleges to better track data on students with young children, while providing clear guidance on data privacy to help standardize data sharing and use policies. This data can create a better understanding of students' needs across academic, student services, and financial aid departments and staff.

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