

# MEETING YOUNG PARENTS WHERE THEY DREAM

A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR A 2GEN APPROACH IN NEW MEXICO

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# DEAR COLLEAGUES:

In recent years, New Mexico has emerged as a vibrant leader in the field of early childhood and a model for how states can leverage financial resources, such as the New Mexico Land Grant Permanent Fund (LGPF), to support educational, physical and emotional health, social, and economic outcomes for families. In particular, New Mexico has elevated the rich traditions and history of Indigenous people to inform and strengthen key policies for families and communities, including but not limited to early childhood development policy. For example, this year's state budget includes nearly \$1.5 million to ensure Tribal leadership in expanding culturally and linguistically relevant prenatal to five early childhood programs throughout the state's 23 sovereign nations. Tribal wisdom and leadership are key facets of creating and informing solutions to move all New Mexico families toward prosperity.

Beginning in fall 2022, Ascend at the Aspen Institute partnered with young parents, practitioners, and policymakers throughout New Mexico to deepen understanding about the status and aspirations of young-parent families, identify a framework for collaboration, and a plan of action to improve outcomes for young parents and their children.

A group of 20 Ascend Parent Advisors, representing the diverse demographics of the state by race/ethnicity and geography, offered insights and feedback on this work and shared their experiences and recommendations as young parents (18-24 years old) in New Mexico. Additionally, community leaders were invited to join the New Mexico 2Gen Strategy Group to identify areas of opportunity and challenges that organizations face in supporting young parents and their families, with a focus on underscoring the strengths, knowledge, and leadership of Tribal families and families of color. Ascend also partnered with in-state consultants to conduct a field scan and landscape analysis to examine policies and practices that currently exist to serve young families in New Mexico - and identify gaps in resources. Finally, we hosted two statewide convenings with more than 120 participants at each.

These conversations aimed to identify policy and practice priorities and areas of collaboration and partnership needed to better meet the needs of young families in New Mexico.

Drawing on the expertise of Parent Advisors and leaders from nonprofit, private, and public organizations in New Mexico, this Collaborative Framework and Plan of Action distills key learnings and findings from our work together to inform and strengthen support for the state's young parents and their children. The goals of this report are to deepen understanding about the aspirations and needs of young parents, highlight practices and policies aligned with a 2Gen approach, showcase opportunities to streamline this work by forging connections between organizations and state systems, and offer recommendations across sectors and at all levels.

We look forward to your feedback on this report and continued engagement toward our collective goals in support of children and families.

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SINCERELY,



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Mexico's 2.1 million people are spread over 121,590 square miles, making the Land of Enchantment one of the biggest and most rural states in the country.<sup>1</sup> Approximately 49 percent Hispanic, 37 percent white, 9 percent Native American, 2 percent Asian, and 2 percent African American, New Mexico is also one of the most diverse states. The 23,306 young parents (ages 18 to 24) who are raising young children in New Mexico are even more racially diverse than the broader population: 78 percent are Hispanic, Native American, Black, or Asian; just 22 percent of young parents are white.<sup>2</sup>

As the next generation of New Mexicans, these young families are important contributors to the future workforce – and economic stability – of the state. However, nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of New Mexico's young parents currently live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL), an annual income of \$60,000 for a household of four.<sup>3</sup> Both the geographic and the rich racial and ethnic diversity of the state often create unique barriers to these young families' economic mobility, ranging from limited transportation and resources (especially in rural communities) to a lack of cultural competency. Young parents also represent the next generation of Tribal leaders. They voice pride and concern in ensuring they can create an intergenerational legacy of cultural wisdom and success for their elders and their children.

With most of the state's quality jobs concentrated in three urban areas, lack of affordable child care, transportation, and housing create major challenges as these young people take on parental responsibilities while navigating public systems and identifying workforce and postsecondary education opportunities. In providing insights for this report, several young parents in New Mexico expressed a desire to look for career opportunities in other states where affordable housing and transportation are located closer to job centers. Other young parents voiced frustration over the lack of culturally competent child care and educational and health-related resources. By investing in systems and policies that meet the needs of young families and enable them to stay and thrive in New Mexico, policymakers have an opportunity to put these families on a solid economic path forward while investing in the future economic well-being of the state.

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<sup>1</sup> New Mexico is the fifth largest state by area. According to the [New Mexico Economic Development Department](#), there are an average of 17 people per square mile compared to the U.S. average of 87 people per square mile.

<sup>2</sup> Wildau, Emily. A Demographic Analysis of Young Parents (Age 18-24) and Their Families in New Mexico. New Mexico Voices for Children. May 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

To better understand opportunities to leverage the strengths of young families – and highlight the practices and policy opportunities with the greatest potential to build stronger economic pathways – [Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#) pursued a range of activities aimed at gathering information and recommendations, including: (1) meeting regularly with a cohort of 20 Parent Advisors in New Mexico as well as a group of policy experts and practitioners from throughout the state; (2) hosting two *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico*, multi-day convenings (November 2022 and May 2023) that gathered each time more than 120 leaders across sectors and from throughout the state; (3) consulting with a strategy group of 10 community and policy leaders from different parts of the state; and (4) commissioning New Mexico Voices for Children to collect and analyze demographic data, using the U.S. Census Bureau’s 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2016 to 2020 and the unique weights and family relationships created by IPUMS USA (originally the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series) .



Sara Mickelson of the Early Childhood Education and Care Department speaking on a panel at the May 2023 *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico* convening. Photo by David Lienemann for Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

Drawing on input from Parent Advisors and aligned with the various initiatives underway in New Mexico, this report offers a Collaborative Framework and accompanying Plan of Action that policymakers, philanthropy, nonprofits, Tribal leaders, and the private sector can use as a roadmap and reference to support New Mexico’s young parents and their children. Featuring recommendations for practices and policies to better support the voice, dreams, and prosperity of 18- to 24-year-old-led families in New Mexico, this document is organized as follows:

- 1) **Collaborative Framework.** An overview that captures some of the many organizations and agencies integral to supporting New Mexico’s young parents and their children.
- 2) **Young Families Profile.** Key characteristics and demographic data of New Mexico’s young parents and their families.

- 3) **Opportunities and Resources.** The resources that exist to support young families from a multigenerational perspective and evidence of progress being made at the state level.
- 4) **Challenges and Barriers to Success.** The most pressing issues and challenges young families are facing in New Mexico.
- 5) **Plan of Action.** Opportunities and recommendations for strengthening a 2Gen or multi-generational approach across programs, partnerships, policies, and systems in New Mexico.
- 6) **Template for Assessing Plan of Action.** A blueprint of key actions to achieve better outcomes for families in New Mexico.

This work pointed to four key strategies that are critical for increasing the well-being of young families in New Mexico by solidifying an approach that recognizes the inherent strengths of children and their caregivers and underscores the multigenerational wisdom of Indigenous families throughout the state:

- **Strengthen and respond to the voices of parents** by ensuring they have a seat at the decision-making table for all policies and programs that impact families.
- **Enhance research and data collection** to better understand the barriers young families face and the opportunities for strengthening their economic mobility. Include young families in understanding the purpose and process for this research and data collection, allowing for the respect of data sovereignty in Tribal communities, and encourage their participation in the process from the beginning.
- **Integrate early childhood and postsecondary services** in the plan to better support both children and their parents. The successful effort to tap additional funding from New Mexico's Land Grant Permanent Fund (LGPF), the state's trust fund to supplement education funding, resulted in a \$1.34 billion earmark for K-12 schools and universities in FY24 and set up a new model for the nonprofit sector, philanthropy, government, and policymakers working together to provide greater supports for families with low incomes, including families of color.
- **Strengthen workforce development programs, career pathways, and employer partnerships** to map pathways to living-wage jobs that account for accessibility, child care, and scheduling.

This report outlines efforts that are already supporting this work in New Mexico and highlights opportunities for policymakers, nonprofits, philanthropy, and employers to continue to build on these successes to improve the well-being of young parents and their families throughout the state.

# INTRODUCTION

New Mexico is one of the most richly diverse states and one of the most rural. Home to one-third of the Navajo Nation, 19 federally-recognized Pueblo communities, and three federally-recognized Apache Tribes, the state also features a powerful history of Indigenous leadership. These distinctions across identity, geography, and race/ethnicity fuel the state's strengths, but also create unique challenges. For example, with just three urban centers – Albuquerque, Las Cruces, and Santa Fe – reliable and flexible transportation is critical to access jobs, health care, and other supports and services. With nearly 25 percent of adults speaking Spanish as their primary language, bi-lingual materials and translation services are also important.<sup>4</sup> Managing challenges like these can be even trickier for parents who are trying to juggle their children's needs and their own.

Mitigating these challenges will enable New Mexico to maintain a strong economy. Part of this effort must include meeting the unique needs of the more than 23,000 young parents (ages 18 to 24) in the state – 73 percent of whom live at or below 200 percent of the [federal poverty line](#). Even more racially diverse than the broader population (78 percent are non-white), these young families represent an important opportunity to future proof the state's workforce. Leveraging this opportunity requires collectively finding solutions that meet the needs of both young parents and their children simultaneously.

The concept of supporting families as a unit is inherent in Indigenous communities throughout New Mexico, the United States, and around the globe. However, most public and nonprofit programs and services are siloed. Modern-era [two-generation \(2Gen\) approaches](#) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously supporting children and parents or other caregivers together. When considering how best to address the needs of New Mexico's young parents and their children, there is a robust body of evidence that demonstrates that 2Gen approaches can accelerate a family's journey on the path to permanent economic security. Organizations and leaders in New Mexico have made important strides in integrating 2Gen approaches into policies and services and there are multiple opportunities to lean into 2Gen approaches to improve family outcomes. The following components comprise the 2Gen approach and are integral to building a cycle of intergenerational opportunity for young families.

**Early Childhood Care and Education.** [Research](#) from Nobel Laureate Dr. James Heckman shows investments in high-quality early education yield a 13 percent return on

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/NM>

investment based on increased school and career achievement as well as reduced social costs. Yet young parents in New Mexico cite several challenges to accessing quality care and early learning opportunities for their children, including affordability, lack of flexible hours, lack of culturally appropriate curriculum, and few options to access care for children with special needs. According to the [2022 New Mexico Kids Count Profile](#), 56 percent of all young children (ages 3-4) in the state are not in school.<sup>5</sup>

**Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways.** Helping parents achieve educational milestones through postsecondary education and workforce development programs leads to higher wages and jobs with greater benefits and opportunities for growth. Approximately 80 percent of young parents in New Mexico have at least one child who is younger than age 5. To pursue living wage jobs and postsecondary workforce opportunities, including postsecondary education, young parents need equitable access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning opportunities. In addition to challenges accessing child care, young parents are impacted by financial constraints, a lack of mentoring and support groups, and the emotional toll of going back to work or school. Any one of these could impede efforts to return to school or the workforce. Combined, they become a major barrier to obtaining quality jobs, particularly for single parents.

**Economic Assets.** A \$3,000 annual increase in a parent's income when their child is young is associated with a 17 percent increase in the child's future earnings.<sup>6</sup> According to the Voices for New Mexico Children demographic data, one-third (33 percent) of young parents have a household income of less than \$25,000 compared to less than one-fifth of older parents (16 percent) and young adults without children (18 percent). For some young parents, economic security becomes difficult to achieve or is delayed due to the responsibilities of parenthood, including the high cost of child care, transportation, and housing. Young parents also cited a need for financial literacy classes.

**Health and Mental Health.** For families to flourish, children and the adults in their lives must have safe and healthy environments, sound nutrition, and equitable access to high-quality care for physical and mental health. Parent Advisors expressed frustration with how they are treated by health care professionals and pointed to a societal stigma of being a young parent as negatively impacting their relationship with the healthcare system. They also discussed the need for translation services as well as medical and mental health

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<sup>5</sup> The percentage of children (ages 3-4) not enrolled in school (including nursery school, preschool, or pre-kindergarten) during the previous three months. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey data, 2016-20

<sup>6</sup> [https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/PathwaysWinter11\\_Duncan.pdf](https://inequality.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/PathwaysWinter11_Duncan.pdf)



services that are aligned with the cultural beliefs of communities, especially Native communities.

**Social Capital.** To thrive and move ahead in life, both adults and children need connections to people and information, along with opportunities to both give and receive support. Evidence suggests that developing social capital contributes to a range of benefits for families, from improving parents' well-being to increasing children's regular school attendance. Parent Advisors noted that their approach to building social connections shifted when they became parents and cited a need to build or strengthen relationships with other young parents who have shared experiences. They noted this can be challenging given the other time commitments they are juggling.

### **Ascending Together: A Vision for Families in New Mexico**

To explore both the needs of and opportunities for young families in New Mexico and surface practices and policies that are ripe for action, Ascend leveraged several learning and community engagement strategies.

### **Parent Advisors and Strategy Group**

A central [principle](#) of 2Gen approaches is to center and engage parents' voices and their recommendations. This principle is rooted in the belief that parents are the experts on their own lives as well as their children's, and are best suited to inform the strategies that aim to improve them.

To inform the insights and recommendations offered in this report, Ascend worked with a strategy group composed of 10 leaders serving young families in New Mexico. Largely but not exclusively from the Ascend Network, this group informed the landscaping process and identified the assets, gaps, and opportunities for supporting young parents in New Mexico. The strategy group also supported this work by connecting Ascend with other partners and community organizations to recruit Parent Advisors living in New Mexico.

A group photo of Parent Advisors during the *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico* convening. See Appendix B for a list of all Parent Advisors.

Photo by David Lienemann for Ascend at the Aspen Institute.



The New Mexico Parent Advisor cohort consisted of 20 young parents (18 to 24 years old) with low incomes who live in the state and have children age 5 or younger. Parent Advisors received a stipend of \$3,500 to consult on 2Gen approaches and share insights about their experiences with local and state programs and systems. Among the Parent Advisor group:

- 25 percent were fathers and 75 percent mothers;
- 25 percent spoke a language other than English (translation and interpretation services were available for all Ascend convenings and calls); and
- 45 percent were Hispanic/Latino; 25 percent American Indian; 15 percent other (1 Multiracial & 2 Middle Eastern and North African or MENA); 10 percent Black; and 5 percent Asian.

Ascend worked in partnership with the Parent Advisors to design the convening agendas to ensure their recommendations were reflected throughout the convenings and reinforced the practice of honoring and compensating parents for their expertise. Parent Advisors elevated critical issues impacting their daily lives and informed the focus of this analysis and the range of opportunities and recommendations that follow.

In partnership with consultant Antionette Tellez-Humble, Ascend hosted monthly, one-hour virtual listening sessions over the span of 10 months with Parent Advisors. The calls examined the [six key components of 2Gen approaches](#): early childhood education, K12 education, postsecondary education and employment pathways, economic assets, social capital, and health (including mental health). Additionally, calls offered time and space for Parent Advisors to prepare for speaking roles at in-person convenings.

### THE SIX KEY COMPONENTS OF TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES

Two-generation approaches (2Gen) build family well-being by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

<p><b>EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head Start</li> <li>• Early Head Start</li> <li>• child care partnerships</li> <li>• preK</li> <li>• home visiting</li> <li>• Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care (FFNC)</li> </ul>	<p><b>SOCIAL CAPITAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• peer and family networks</li> <li>• coaching</li> <li>• cohort strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>K-12</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• kindergarten ready</li> <li>• 3rd grade reading skills</li> <li>• parent engagement</li> <li>• graduation and postsecondary prep</li> </ul>	<p><b>HEALTH, INCLUDING MENTAL HEALTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• mental, physical, and behavioral health</li> <li>• coverage and access to care</li> <li>• adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress</li> </ul>
<p><b>POSTSECONDARY &amp; EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community college</li> <li>• training and credentials</li> <li>• workforce partnerships</li> <li>• employer partnerships</li> </ul>	<p><b>ECONOMIC ASSETS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• asset building</li> <li>• housing and public supports</li> <li>• financial capacity</li> <li>• transportation</li> </ul>



Parent Advisors reported they were grateful for the opportunity these calls offered to connect with other parents who were experiencing similar challenges. The group exchanged resources and affirmed one another through their connections. They also shared that their active roles at the convenings helped them build professional skills such as public speaking and networking.

### Statewide Convenings

In November 2022 and May 2023, Ascend gathered more than 120 leaders from across the state, including young parents, policy experts, and program practitioners, for a two-part, in-person convening. *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico* was designed to: (1) Explore and surface key opportunities and challenges to approaches that support, center, and serve young parents age 18 to 24 and their families in New Mexico; (2) Identify strategic practice and policy priorities to align around a framework for young parents age 18 to 24 and their families to achieve educational success, economic security, and health and well-being; and (3) Identify areas of collaboration and partnership for improved strategies for young parents throughout the state.



Photo captions (clockwise) – 1: Valeria Martinez, an Ascend Parent Advisor, speaking on a panel. 2: Yarely Quintana-Chavez, an Ascend Parent Advisor, speaking at the convening. 3: Jacob Vigil of New Mexico Voices for Children addressing convening participants. 4: A group discussion of convening participants.

All photos by David Lienemann at the May 2023 *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico* convening for Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

## **Landscape Analysis and Demographic Data Analysis**

A landscape analysis surfaced more than a dozen policies and practices that are currently in place to support young families in New Mexico, as well as the gaps and roadblocks that exist for young families with low incomes. This landscape analysis was informed by a strategic engagement with young parents, policy experts, program practitioners, and the insights from the November 2022 and May 2023 convenings. The analysis was also informed by: 12 focus group sessions with a total of 20 young parents over a six-month period; six focus groups with a total of 10 policy and program experts over that same time frame; five breakout groups during the November 2022 convening; and interviews with a small group of other stakeholders representing philanthropy, government, and the private sector. Parent participants were compensated for their expertise and time.

Additionally, Ascend worked with New Mexico Voices for Children to compile a demographic analysis of young families in New Mexico. The analysis was based on Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) USA cross-tabulations using the U.S. Census Bureau's 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2016 to 2020 and the unique weights and family relationships created by IPUMS USA.



# COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK

Although there is a constellation of organizations, agencies, and partnerships making strides to help young families in New Mexico succeed (see Appendix C), there are compelling opportunities to collaborate more effectively and promote stronger outcomes. Importantly, there is a significant need for the public sector to listen to, learn from, and partner more effectively with community organizations to both spur new innovations and infuse capital – social, financial, and intellectual – into collaborations that will advance well-being for young parents.

The ecosystem that has emerged as being essential for young parents and their children to move toward opportunity is grounded in a 2Gen approach. Throughout this two-year process, Parent Advisors, strategy group members, and convening participants repeatedly pointed to the importance of integrated approaches that provide opportunities for and meet the needs of children and the adults in their lives.

Four key strategies emerged as critical to building a framework to support a 2Gen approach to increase family well-being in New Mexico.

## Strengthen Parent Voice

Government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private sector employers can gain valuable insight into policy design and implementation, as well as critical feedback and input on programs and workplace environments, by leveraging the insights of the people these programs aim to support. Among the most valuable and enlightening experiences in this process was a meeting between the Parent Advisors and members of Governor Lujan Grisham’s cabinet in the winter of 2022. The conversation resulted in an improved understanding of specific barriers facing young parents in the state, particularly with regards to child care access and transportation. Infusing human-centered design and creating more spaces for policymakers and others in positions of power and influence to hear directly from parents, especially young parents, about how they experience systems and specific programs related to health, housing, education, and economic security can yield significant positive outcomes.

## Enhance Research & Data Collection

Conducting a demographic analysis to accompany this framework was difficult given the barriers that exist to collect data for children. Young parents (age 18 to 24) are bellwethers for measuring the effectiveness of policies and systems that impact the six key components



of 2Gen approaches and ultimately family well-being. Government agencies and research organizations can help by reorienting some of their data collecting methods to ensure policymakers, philanthropies, nonprofits, and private sector learn as much as possible about this key demographic's unique needs and interests. Additionally, data sovereignty should be respected in Native communities.

## **Integrate Key Early Childhood and Postsecondary Services for Families**

Sustained civic engagement and extensive community organizing led the successful effort to tap additional funding from [New Mexico's Land Grant Permanent Fund \(LGPF\)](#) to supplement public K-12 education funding and expand funding for early care and education. There is an interest and opportunity to leverage the collaborations that were a part of the LGPF campaign and orient them toward collaboratives that work on addressing the six key components of a 2Gen approach – with a particular emphasis on young families (more on opportunities for aligning multi-generational approaches with the LGPF can be found in following sections).

## **Strengthen Workforce Development, Career Pathways, and Employer Partnerships**

Representative of the next generation of New Mexico's workforce, Parent Advisors shared that while New Mexico is 'home,' they have concerns about raising their families and their incomes in the state, given the high cost of living in the state's metropolitan areas – and the lack of affordable transportation options for accessing these urban job markets from other parts of the state. Additionally, community organizations often lack the capacity to effectively partner with employers in urban centers to ensure pathways to living wage jobs. There is a significant opportunity for policymakers at the state, county, and city level to develop a multi-sector task force, informed by and including Parent Advisors, to engage employers in urban, rural, and Tribal communities and to map pathways to living wage jobs.

# YOUNG FAMILIES IN NEW MEXICO PROFILE

Ascend commissioned New Mexico Voices for Children (NMVC) to collect demographic information on young parents and their families in New Mexico. The analysis was conducted by NMVC and based on IPUMS USA cross-tabulations using the U.S. Census Bureau's Five-Year American Community Survey (ACS) data for 2016 to 2020 and the unique weights and family relationships created by IPUMS USA.

Key data trends of New Mexico's approximately 23,306 young parents are highlighted here to provide context for the population that the recommended programs and policies featured in this report can support.

## **Young Parent Population and Ethnicity**

Of New Mexico's total population of just over 2 million, 18 percent are parents of children who are under age 18. Among New Mexico's parent population, 6 percent (23,306 people) are young parents (ages 18 to 24). These young parents skew to the older side of the age range – 70 percent are aged 21 to 24.

Of New Mexico's total population, more than half (63 percent) are people of color, with Hispanic being the single largest demographic group (49 percent).<sup>7</sup> Most young parents in the state (65 percent) are Hispanic, followed by white (22 percent), Native American (11 percent), and Black (2 percent).

## **Gender**

Females make up a slight majority of the state's total population (50.5 percent females compared to 49.5 percent males). However, 69 percent of young parents in New Mexico are women. By contrast, women represent 55 percent of parents aged 25 and older and 45 percent of young adults with no children.<sup>8</sup>

## **Number of Children**

Data gathered from young parents provides an estimate of 36,400 children living with young parents in New Mexico. Approximately 80 percent of young parents have at least

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<sup>7</sup> Race and ethnicity data were analyzed so that each race is calculated to include only the non-Hispanic respondents of that race. Hispanic respondents of all races were included in the Hispanic ethnicity category.

<sup>8</sup> Researchers identified respondents as either 'male' or 'female' in the data, which is a limitation that does not account for those who may identify as non-binary.

one child younger than 5 years old, and the majority of young parents (59 percent) have just one child, meaning many children of young parents are only children.

### **Workforce**

Forty percent of young parents are either unemployed or not in the labor force. A similar percent of young adults without children are either unemployed or not in the labor force, suggesting unemployment and lack of labor force participation may have more to do with age than parental status.

Among all young parents who are unemployed, 60 percent are female and 40 percent are male. However, females represent 88 percent of young parents who are not in the labor force. This may indicate that becoming a parent at a young age may prevent young women from participating in the labor force.

### **Income and Poverty Rates**

Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of young parents live at or below 200 percent the [federal poverty line](#) (FPL), compared to less than half of older parents (41 percent) and young adults without children (49 percent). One-third (33 percent) of young parents have a household income of less than \$25,000 compared to less than one-fifth of older parents (16 percent) and young adults without children (18 percent). More than half of young parents (55 percent) make less than \$40,000 annually, while that rate is much lower for older parents (28 percent) and young adults without children (31 percent).

A little more than three-quarters of young parents with a household income below \$25,000 are women. However, all young parents earning more than \$400,000 and 70 percent of young parents earning \$100,000 to \$400,000 are also women.

Notably, 45 percent of young Native American parents have incomes at or below \$25,000, the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups. This is tied to historic disinvestment in Native American communities, lack of education that appropriately reflects Native American culture, language, and history, land theft, historical trauma, and many other issues of systemic racism that have stripped significant opportunities from Tribes, Nations, Pueblos, and their members to develop and grow wealth. More than half (52 percent) of young parents who are Native American live below the FPL with the vast majority (80 percent) living at or below 200 percent FPL, the highest rate among all racial and ethnic groups. However, the majority of young parents of all races and ethnicities live at or below 200 percent FPL, further emphasizing the poor economic conditions of this population.

## **Education**

Just 16 percent of young parents are in school, compared to 47 percent of young adults with no children who are in school. Of young parents who are in school, 66 percent are women. Young parents who are Hispanic make up the majority (66 percent) of those in school. Of all young parents, 20 percent do not have a high school diploma, 40 percent have a high school diploma or equivalency, 10 percent have some college but less than one year, and 21 percent have one or more years of college, but no degree. Of all young parents who do not have a high school diploma, nearly three-fourths (72 percent) are female.

## **Health Benefits**

The vast majority of young parents (86 percent) have health insurance coverage. Of those with coverage, 77 percent have a public coverage option — nearly all of these young parents are enrolled in Medicaid. Of young parents without health coverage, 56 percent are mothers.

## **SNAP**

Of the more than half (53%) of young parents in New Mexico who receive SNAP benefits, 69% are mothers and 67% are Hispanic.

Overall, the NMVC determined young parents in New Mexico face unique challenges as they take on parental responsibilities, including lower paying jobs, a myriad of economic barriers, and fewer opportunities to pursue the education and training that can provide a path to success and higher paying jobs. Often, these young parents face the tradeoff of either working and putting school on hold or of attending school while still affording child care and basic necessities for their young families. Researchers noted that in spite of the many challenges of being a young parent – or perhaps because of them – this population is motivated, organized, resourceful, and resilient. These strengths can help create stronger economic pathways for these young families.

# OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES

This section explores notable initiatives and policies that exist in New Mexico and provide illustrative examples and models for supporting young parents and their families. Details about specific programs are included in the subsequent section, with additional details on Tribal initiatives focused on language.

## Early Care and Learning

Over the past two decades, tremendous gains have been made in practice, policy, systems change, and philanthropy to support families with low incomes living in New Mexico. During this time, through a combination of research, advocacy, and organizing, and with leadership from experts across many sectors, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested in programs aimed at increasing the quality of and access to K-12 and early childhood education, healthcare, postsecondary opportunities, and increasing economic assets. In early childhood alone, the New Mexico Legislature appropriated nearly \$640 million to early childhood programming, an increase of over 50 percent since FY23.<sup>9</sup> Notably, on November 8, 2022, New Mexico passed a [ballot measure](#), also known as Constitutional Amendment 1, to amend the state constitution and allow early childhood education to be funded through the LGPF.

In 2020, the New Mexico Legislature passed and Governor Lujan Grisham [signed a bill to create the Early Childhood Trust Fund](#). Launched with a general fund appropriation of \$320 million, the Fund will be sustained by the surplus of two revenue sources and will make distributions to support early childhood programming beginning in fiscal year 2022. A 2023 law requires either \$150 million or 5 percent of the average year-end market value of the fund, whichever is greater, to be distributed each year. At the end of calendar year 2023, the Early Childhood Trust Fund is expected to have \$5.5 billion. That balance is projected to almost double by 2027.

Through a mix of state and federal funds, the state and local governments, including Tribal governments, have collectively invested hundreds of millions of dollars to expand access to and quality of early childhood care and education.<sup>10</sup> In FY21, 14, 130 children were

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<sup>9</sup> [Early Childhood Accountability Report 2023.pdf \(nmlegis.gov\)](#)

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LFC/Documents/Early\\_Childhood\\_And\\_Education/Early%20Childhood%20Accountability%20Report%202023.pdf](https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LFC/Documents/Early_Childhood_And_Education/Early%20Childhood%20Accountability%20Report%202023.pdf)



enrolled in a state-funded child care program. By FY22, that number had jumped to 18,423.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1. Number and Type of Early Childhood Programs Funded by the Department

Programs	Number of Providers	Number of Children
<b>Early Care, Education, and Nutrition Division</b>		
Child Care	936 licensed homes and centers 1,429 registered home	18,423 (monthly average)
PreK	247 school-based sites 215 community-based sites	14,183
Family Nutrition	25 Summer Food sponsors 2,235 CACFP providers 358 summer meal sites	31,663 CACFP meal recipients (monthly average)
<b>Family Support and Early Intervention Division</b>		
Home Visiting	33	6,766
Family Infant Toddler	34	13,827
Families FIRST	17 ECECD nurses	3,987
<b>Head Start State Collaboration Office</b>		
Early Head Start	14 grantees 7 Tribal grantees	2,362
Head Start	13 grantees 17 Tribal grantees 1 Migrant/Seasonal grantee	6,433

In 2022, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) dramatically expanded child care assistance eligibility to 400% Federal Poverty Level and waived co-payments for parents. Additionally, ECECD instituted wage increases for early childhood professionals. In partnership with community colleges and universities, the state offers child care professionals scholarships and learning stipends programs to earn degrees and certifications, with an emphasis on recruiting bilingual early childhood teachers in multiple languages.<sup>12</sup>

In September 2023, Gov. Lujan Grisham announced a \$98 million investment to the Mescalero Apache Tribe, the Pueblo of Nambé, the Navajo Nation, and the To’Hajiilee Chapter of the Navajo Nation and the Pueblo of Tesuque (which was part of a pilot project) to launch or continue pre-K programs informed by Indigenous culture and practices.<sup>13</sup>

In partnership with nonprofit organizations, state, local, and Tribal governments, and academic institutions, the philanthropic sector in New Mexico has played an active role in supporting research in early childhood care and education programs to determine efficacy, parent voice in the policy arena, and systems change work through partnerships with state, local, and Tribal governments. A cohort of New Mexico-based funders – including St.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.nmececd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ECECD-Annual-Outcomes-Final-Report\\_Jan2023\\_ECECDComms\\_web.pdf](https://www.nmececd.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/ECECD-Annual-Outcomes-Final-Report_Jan2023_ECECDComms_web.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nmececd.org/scholarships/>

<sup>13</sup> <https://earlylearningnation.com/2023/09/five-tribal-communities-in-new-mexico-to-receive-98-million/>

Joseph's Community Health, the LANL Foundation, and the Brindle Foundation – was critical in advancing an early childhood agenda in the state. Currently, philanthropic organizations seeking to share information on early childhood issues participate in the [New Mexico Early Childhood Funders Group](#) (NMECFG) as well as the national [Early Childhood Funders Collaborative](#).

Featuring a mix of private and public Foundations working to improve the lives of babies, young children, and their families throughout the state, NMECFG members advocate for quality, comprehensive early childhood systems that meet the developmental and cultural needs of all New Mexico families. The group shares ideas, knowledge, and resources and works together to advance opportunities to enhance the well-being of New Mexico's young children and their families. This group has the potential to also be a strong mechanism for strengthening social capital among parents in the state, including funding cohort strategies for parent engagement.

## **Increased Minimum Wage**

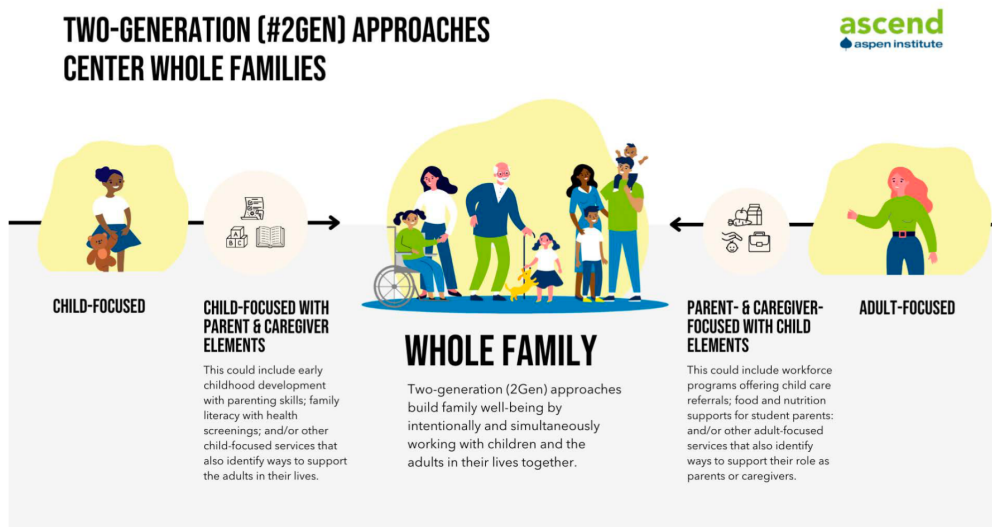
The state is moving to increase the average household income. On January 1, 2023, New Mexico increased its minimum wage to \$12 per hour (\$3 for tipped employees), while effective March 1, 2023 the city of Santa Fe increased its minimum wage to \$14.03 per hour. Given that two of the largest employment sectors in the state are retail and hotel/food service, raising the minimum wage increased the take-home pay for tens of thousands of New Mexico workers.

## **A Two-Generation Approach**

With tremendous need and the resounding demand for systems to better support children, young parents, and communities in New Mexico, advancing solutions and innovations grounded in 2Gen approaches and applying learnings from the national context is one way to help families throughout the state thrive.




Many programs, systems, and policies focus solely on the child or the parent. The 2Gen approach does not focus exclusively on either children or adults because their well-being is interconnected. Instead, it takes stock of the family as a whole and uses a holistic, affirming, family-centered lens to understand the multiple unique dimensions of families and consider a variety of pathways for promoting positive outcomes (see Exhibit 1). By serving families as a whole, 2Gen approaches create opportunities for both young parents and their children to thrive by intentionally and simultaneously working with children and the adults in their lives together.

Exhibit 1. The 2Gen Approach Centers the Whole Family



The 2Gen approach has a vision for family well-being and has identified essential experiences, supports, and resources that are necessary for families to thrive. Programs and policies focused on early childhood and K-12 education, postsecondary and employment pathways, economic assets, and health and well-being are fundamental to a 2Gen approach. Social capital: the trusted networks of friends, family, and institutions upon which a family relies, is often called “the secret sauce” when taking a 2Gen approach.

**The highest level of 2Gen Approaches would be:**

-  a system and culture that recognizes the holistic needs of families
-  to partner with families on service delivery decisions
-  to provide services to children and parents simultaneously, tracking outcomes for both

Along with these six components are [five core principles that underlie the 2Gen approach](#):

**(1) Measure and account for outcomes for both children and their parents or caregivers.** Improving outcomes for both the adults and children in a family is at the heart of 2Gen strategies. 2Gen organizations should measure how well they meet the needs of children and adults. Organizations seeking to infuse the 2Gen approach into all aspects of their operations should measure their progress toward and achievement of desired changes in their structures and operations. Rigorous Participatory Evaluation can then examine the degree to which improvements in organizational processes result in better outcomes for children, adults, and families as a whole.

**(2) Engage and listen to the voices of families.** Engage, listen and respond to the voices of families. Families know best what they need and how current programs and services may be falling short. Listening to families and including their perspectives, experiences, and aspirations in the design and evaluation of 2Gen strategies is core to the 2Gen approach.

**(3) Ensure equity.** All families should have the same opportunity to reach their potential. Achieving organizational change requires incorporating principles of equity, including racial and gender equity, in all aspects of an organization's work, from the programs and services it provides to its relationships with families and its day-to-day operations.

**(4) Align and link systems and funding streams.** Align and link systems and funding streams. Categorical funding results in an array of disparate funding streams aimed narrowly at particular needs of children, parents, and families. 2Gen programs and organizations need to braid and blend funding from multiple sources to provide whole-family services. Organizational change also requires the alignment of policies, practices, and systems – such as eligibility standards, intake protocols, and the secure collection and sharing of family data – across community organizations and among state- and local-level service delivery systems.

**(5) Foster innovation and evidence together.** Organizational change is hard. Tap into evidence-based practices and organizational innovations that hold promise for improved service delivery. Build or strengthen organizational capacity that promotes the culture, leadership, knowledge, relationships, and infrastructure to produce policies, structures, and practices that integrate innovation and evidence.

Insights from parents and data specific to New Mexico support a 2Gen approach to achieve better outcomes for young parents and their families. In this work, it has been critical to explore and lift up the experiences of Native young parents in different parts of the state. Ohkay Owingeh member Veronica Ramirez shares:

*“Being an Indigenous young parent comes with additional obligations to ourselves, our families, our children, and our Tribes. This structures and impacts every aspect of my parenting and I take it very seriously. I am extremely appreciative of the community, resources, family and friends, and the various entities that have had and continue to have involvement in our family's lives. Because that's what is missing, the interconnectedness of us all. That's what I want leaders to understand. We may all have different experiences or come from various backgrounds, but that shouldn't define us, and definitely shouldn't hold us or our families back. We need to become united to*

*support, uplift, and learn from one another. Through that, we will become stronger. We need to stop repeating the cycles of hurt and become proactive rather than reactive. Help us get to a healthy community by being inclusive of young parents, grandparents, and the community, because you don't know the capacity and capability of the people. Believe in us. Believe in New Mexico.”*



Veronica Ramirez, an Ascend Parent Advisor, speaking on a panel at the May 2023 *Ascending Together for Young Parent Families in New Mexico* convening. Photo by David Lienemann for Ascend at the Aspen Institute.

Embracing a statewide 2Gen approach requires an assessment of how practitioners and policymakers are serving families holistically across the six components and how they are leveraging the five core principles of 2Gen. For many, an important step toward 2Gen approaches involves creating a community-wide strategy to align and coordinate services for the entire family. Moving toward this vision of 2Gen approaches in New Mexico would be incredibly impactful for young parents and their children.



## CHALLENGES, BREAKTHROUGHS, AND PARENT RECOMMENDATIONS

There are decades of evidence that demonstrate that engaged and supportive families are a major contributor to positive child outcomes.<sup>14</sup> This evidence supports structural changes that move from providing services and information solely to the parent or the child to 2Gen approaches that empower families by combining child and adult-focused services and prioritizing two-way communication and partnerships.

This section examines the specific issues and challenges young families face across the core components of a 2Gen approach and expands on why advancement in these areas is essential for supporting young parents and their children in New Mexico. Also included are breakthroughs that are already mitigating challenges for young parents as well as recommendations from Parent Advisors about additional actions that are needed.

### Early Childhood Care and Education

The earliest months and years of life are a period of incredible brain development. Early care and early childhood education (ECE) programs shape brain architecture and build the foundation for later learning and development. Research shows that investments in high-quality early education yield a 13 percent return on investment based on increased school and career achievement, as well as reduced social costs. Yet young parents in New Mexico cite several challenges to accessing quality care and early learning opportunities for their children. And, according to the 2022 New Mexico Kids Count Profile, 56 percent of all young children in the state are not in school.<sup>15</sup>

*“You either can’t afford child care, or there’s not adequate child care. Most of the daycares here are like thousands of dollars a month . . . who’s supposed to afford that on minimum wage? Or, they’re [poorly] run ones and they’re closed every other week because of sickness. . . How are you supposed to provide for your family when you can’t even take your kids to daycare so you can go to work?”*

*– Ascend Parent Advisor, New Mexico*

Most Parent Advisors expressed a desire to be their children’s primary caregiver and stay at home, at least for a part of the child’s early years. Some parents of children with special needs said they were in the best position to provide care for their child. One parent

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<sup>14</sup> <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/21868/chapter/1>

<sup>15</sup> The percentage of children (ages 3-4) not enrolled in school (including nursery school, preschool, or pre-kindergarten) during the previous three months. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey data, 2016-20

described her situation:

*“I don’t leave her with family because she has disabilities and things that people don’t know how to handle. It would be ideal if I was able to not work and just take care of her because it’s really hard juggling work with her and all her appointments. She’s had three appointments this week and it’s Wednesday.” – Ascend Parent Advisor, New Mexico*

Many young parents in New Mexico — a state that includes a sizable population of immigrants, refugees, and members of Tribal Communities — also find it challenging to find child care and early education programs that are both culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Parents who are unable to find suitable and affordable child care and education programs are opting for a combination of caring for their children themselves, relying on a friend or family member, or engaging a home-based provider. While parents enjoy caring for their children, some delay their career or educational goals to do so. These delays carry an emotional and economic cost to both the parents and their families. For a significant number of parents, available early care and education offerings are not working and vastly different alternatives are needed.

### **Challenges**

As Parent Advisors and other community leaders examined what it will take to strengthen early childhood and education supports for young parents and their children in New Mexico, they cited these challenges:

- **Child care is hard to find.** Parent advisors pointed to long wait lists at most nearby quality centers as a major challenge. Many Parent Advisors noted they rely on family members for child care. When a family member is not available, young parents stay home with their children.
- **Cumbersome application process.** Many families are unaware of changes to child care eligibility rules and waived co-payments for some income levels. Additionally, the lengthy application process often leaves families waiting for weeks or even months before they are able to access child care.
- **Lack of flexible scheduling.** Parents cited a need for early care and learning programs that match their own schedules. One parent noted, “[Child care] hours aren’t conducive for a working schedule. It was only open from 8 to 2, so what’s a parent supposed to do if you can’t find a job that will accommodate that 8 to 2 schedule? There’s not a ton of choices.”

Young parents who are working or attending classes need programs with flexible hours that meet their schedules. Parents noted this must include extended evening and weekend hours.

- **Lack of early education programs that emphasize the culture and home language of the child.** Parents question whether providers will offer culturally competent care. One Parent Advisor noted that although the community she lives in is saturated with people who are bilingual, school materials are all in English. She noted that representation matters when it comes to ensuring a family feels like it belongs.
- **An inability to care for children with special needs.** Several parents cited a lack of trust in the safety and quality of care available for their families and some noted that they are particularly concerned that nearby child care centers are not equipped to deal with children who require special supports.
- **Lack of transportation options.** The sheer geographic size of New Mexico – at 121,598 square miles it is the fifth largest state – makes it challenging for parents to access child care and early learning centers. Parent Advisors noted child care and learning centers are often located far from public transportation options or their place of work.
- **Need to change the narrative around young parents.** When it comes to making decisions about what is best for their children, young parents themselves do not feel respected. This plays out in medical offices, schools, and other institutions that work with families.

### **Breakthroughs: Early Childhood Care and Education**

- **Permanent funding.** In November 2022, New Mexico became the first U.S. state to amend its constitution to create a [permanent fund for child care and early learning](#) that sets aside approximately \$150 million a year for early childhood learning. The additional [funding will expand access](#) to pre-K in New Mexico by 40%, while increasing instructional hours for select programs, expanding the number of seats in classrooms, and increasing salaries of early childhood workers. Using nearly \$100 million from the LGPF requested by the governor and appropriated by the state Legislature during the 2023 session, the ECECD awarded a total of 279 PreK grants to 84 school district programs and 195 community-based programs, family child care providers, Tribal governments, and Head Start grantees. The funding will also be used to significantly expand instructional hours and increase pay for PreK teachers in the awarded programs.

This fund comes on the heels of the [Early Childhood Trust Fund](#). Signed into law in 2020, the Trust Fund makes annual distributions to support early childhood

programming.

- **Culturally appropriate programs.** Native and Tribal education leaders have taken major steps toward transforming curriculum and school culture that centers the identity of the child. One example is the [Keres Children’s Learning Center \(KCLC\)](#) which, in partnership with Cochiti Pueblo, has developed a unique early education curriculum built around the language and culture of Keres speaking communities. Describing itself as a “language revitalization school,” KCLC takes an intergenerational approach to implementing a dual-language curriculum using Montessori pedagogy. KCLC is funded entirely through private donations, including [philanthropic support](#).

In Northwest New Mexico, [Jemez Pueblo](#) has transformed its Head Start programs to integrate Jemez culture and traditions. Aiming to ensure all students are fluent in the Jemez language, the [Walatowa Head Start Language Immersion Program](#) features a curriculum that is based on the traditional calendar of the Tribe and centered on what it means to be a member of the Jemez community. The program is funded through a mix of federal, Tribal, and philanthropic support.

The [Native American Community Academy \(NACA\)](#) is a tuition-free public charter school serving grades K-12. Located in Albuquerque, NACA includes students from more than 60 different tribes and focuses on identity through culture and language, holistic wellness, community and family, and academic preparation. The school led to the [NACA Inspired Schools Network \(NISN\)](#), a movement of students, families, and educators working to establish schools in New Mexico and throughout the country that integrate the culture of Indigenous communities into the curriculum

### **Parent Advisor Recommendations**

- Give families a seat at the decision-making table and ensure they have a say in how state early childhood funds are disbursed. As one convening participant noted, “Real systemic change happens in co-design which is a much more iterative process.”
- Make space for parents to engage in a professional capacity – including compensation and benefits – to increase capacity within the community while building trust with families.
- Listen to families in a way that is culturally inclusive and honor the history, cultures, languages, and unique differences in a community.

## Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways

Education is a key driver of family economic security and building a cycle of intergenerational opportunity. Helping parents achieve educational milestones through postsecondary education and workforce development programs leads to higher wages and jobs with greater benefits and opportunities for growth. For example, research shows that parents who complete a college degree [double their incomes](#).<sup>16</sup> A parent's level of educational attainment is also a strong predictor of their child's success.<sup>17</sup>

Approximately 80 percent of young parents in New Mexico have at least one child younger than 5 years old. For these parents to pursue living wage jobs and postsecondary workforce opportunities, including postsecondary education or other career pathways, they need access to affordable, high-quality child care and early learning opportunities. For parents unable to find suitable child care, work and employment opportunities are limited. This negatively affects household income. And for those who want to continue their education and career training, both the opportunity cost and actual cost of going to school make it a difficult decision.

*“Right now my son has been staying with me all day so I can’t work. I have to stay home and complete school online. It’s difficult to study and participate in online classes and take care of my son. I am hoping to find a free daycare that I can enroll him in.”*

*–Ascend Parent Advisor, New Mexico*

Hitting pause on work or school to care for children can make it difficult for a parent to get back on track, but Parent Advisors voiced a strong interest in going back to work and/or obtaining a degree or certification, especially as a means to support their children. As one Parent Advisor noted, *“The day that I found out I was pregnant, I decided that I needed to finish high school because it wasn't about my future anymore.”*

Given that young parents of young children make up a significant part of New Mexico's potential workforce, addressing the challenges young parents face when returning to school or entering the workforce is not only important for the economic well-being of these families, but also critical to the economic stability of the state. This will require programs that offer young parents access to affordable, quality child care; predictable and accommodating scheduling; transportation; and living-wage pay and benefits. Employers can support workers who are also young parents by understanding and incorporating their

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2011/acs/acs-14.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2018421>

needs into hiring and workplace policies.

## Challenges

Parent Advisors described the following challenges in relation to postsecondary education and employment pathways:

- **Scheduling.** Parents noted that class and work schedules are often misaligned with their child’s care or school schedule. Child care support has to be flexible to accommodate the unique needs of young parents. This should include offering priority child care enrollment at colleges and universities located on campuses, in addition to extending care to accommodate evening classes.
- **Financial constraints.** Student loans and debt are barriers to young parents pursuing additional coursework or credentials as is the high cost of child care. Additionally, Parent Advisors noted that internship opportunities that could help them advance in the workplace are often unpaid.
- **Need for mentoring and support groups.** Parent Advisors consistently shared their appreciation for the opportunity to come together as a cohort to share insights, exchange resources, and provide support and guidance to each other. These spaces also provided affirmation and visibility for parents going through crises or juggling the myriad of challenges parenting presents. Postsecondary institutions have the opportunity to provide more cohort models to ensure parents are engaged with each other and supported through their unique (though not rare) circumstances.
- **Emotional toll.** Going back to work can be challenging for parents in several ways. Often overlooked is the emotional toll the transition can take. One Parent Advisor described her experience starting a new job: *“I just started a new job as a preschool teacher. Being away from my baby is kind of hard. She’s only six months old. I want to work. . . but sometimes I miss being around my baby all day. I feel a little overwhelmed.”*

## Breakthroughs: Postsecondary Education and Employment Pathways

- **Time off to care for families.** New Mexico’s [Healthy Workplaces Act of 2021](#) requires most employers to allow employees to accrue up to eight days of paid time off to care for themselves or a family member.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.nmpovertylaw.org/2022/06/30/paid-sick-leave-law-goes-into-effect-tomorrow-july-1/>



- **Tuition assistance.** With the [New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship](#), New Mexico became the first state to offer a tuition-free college program. What started as a lottery scholarship for recent high school graduates has expanded to cover adults and those who left college without completing a degree program.
- **On Campus Child Care.** Through [Little Suncats](#), Central New Mexico Community College (CNM) provides child care/after-school vouchers to qualified student-parents based on financial need and enrollment status to cover child care costs. The program also gives participants priority registration to CNM summer camps. Other 2Gen programming at CNM includes [Family Financial Literacy Courses](#) and a [Parents as Virtual Partners](#) workshop.

[University of New Mexico Children's Campus](#) also offers a variety of child care options for parents who are students, a grant funded drop-in and evening care program that is available on a first-come, first-served basis for eligible student families with children ages six weeks through 12 years.

Santa Fe Community College also offers on-site child care (Early Childhood Center of Excellence) as does San Juan Community College (Child and Family Development Center) and Western New Mexico University (Child Development Center).

- **Guaranteed income for parents who are students.** With funds from [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#) (MGI), the City of Santa Fe launched the [Learn, Earn, Achieve Program \(LEAP\)](#) in conjunction with Santa Fe Community College (SFCC). Designed to explore the outcomes of a guaranteed income, the project awards parents who are enrolled in degree or certificate programs at the SFCC with \$400 over the course of a year.
- **Coaching and mentoring.** SFCC also launched a [Student Parent Success Program](#) that connects student parents with coaches and peers to support their academic success and family well-being.
- **Career counseling.** In western New Mexico, Zuni Pueblo offers students who are parents an array of support services as well as pathways to employment and small business ownership. Resources at the [A-shiwi College and Career Readiness Center](#), located on [Zuni Pueblo](#) and operated by the Tribe through an agreement with [Navajo Technical University](#), include on-line courses, face to face instruction, dual credit courses for high school students, and workshops and training based on surveyed needs of the community.

- **Financial support.** Ascend’s [Black and Native Futures Fund](#) provides financial support and 2Gen technical assistance to select Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). The Fund currently supports student parents at Diné College in New Mexico by providing a dedicated study room, evening reading workshops for children up to age eight, on-campus family housing, and a mental health coordinator who works specifically with student parents on childhood development and family well-being.

### **Parent Advisor Recommendations**

- As the state works to improve the child care system, employers can help young parents by being more accommodating to child care needs and offering a flexible work schedule.
- Postsecondary education institutions and workforce development programs should build partnerships with tribal communities to offer wraparound services that help young Indigenous parents strengthen economic pathways.

## **Economic Assets**

In April 2020, 32 percent of households nationwide with young children reported difficulty paying for at least one basic need (e.g., housing, food, utilities). The overall rate of hardship continued to increase in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and peaked at 37 percent nationally in September 2020. As federal policies, including expanded unemployment benefits, kicked in and federal stimulus checks began to reach Americans, [RAPID data show a decline](#) in the overall rates of hardship among families with young children. In December 2020, 36 percent of households were experiencing material hardship. From December 2020 to April 2021, when economic supports were in place, this rate dropped thirteen points to 23 percent of households. Similarly, RAPID data show that expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit payments stabilized hardship rates around 23 to 27 percent between July and December 2021. The RAPID Survey tracked families who received the Child Tax Credit (CTC) over a period of six months compared to those who did not and found that hardships dropped drastically. Researchers found that friend and family support was not just beneficial for emotional support, but also for material things such as child care, housing expenses, and debt.

In November 2020, during a presentation at the statewide convening, Amber Wallin, executive director of New Mexico Voices for Children, highlighted New Mexico’s leadership in supporting families through policy by raising the minimum wage, ensuring

guaranteed paid sick leave, limiting predatory lending, doubling tax credit for families, including immigrants, and, most recently, approving constitutional guarantee of early childhood education.

Economic assets such as housing, reliable internet services, transportation, financial education and asset building opportunities, tax credits, student financial aid, nutrition assistance, and more are core to 2Gen approaches.<sup>19</sup> Increases in economic assets have an impact on future generations. For example, a \$3,000 difference in a parent’s income when their child is young is associated with a [17 percent increase](#) in the child’s future earnings.

On January 1, 2023, New Mexico increased its minimum wage to \$12 per hour (\$3 for tipped employees) while the city of Santa Fe increased its minimum wage to \$14.03 per hour. Given that two of the largest employment sectors in the state are retail and hotel/food service, raising the minimum wage increased the take-home pay for tens of thousands of New Mexico workers.

New Mexico’s economy is also largely dependent on public sector jobs including mining, oil, and gas extraction. Passed and signed into law in 2019, the [NM Energy Transition Act](#) has set statewide renewable energy goals that simultaneously restrict further production of fossil fuels and instead increase demand for renewable energy. The Act established a committee aimed at assisting current non-renewable energy workers’ transition toward renewable energy jobs while also working with various stakeholders, including Tribes, to develop plans to help workers and communities mitigate the negative consequences of energy transition and take advantage of the economic opportunities it affords.

## Challenges

Economic insecurity is a theme facing many New Mexican families, especially during and since the pandemic. For some young parents, economic security becomes difficult to achieve or is delayed due to the responsibilities of parenthood, including the high cost of child care, transportation, and housing. Following are the biggest challenges to economic asset building that the Parent Advisors are grappling with:

- **Opportunity cost and benefits cliff.** Parent Advisors noted that extra income can make them ineligible for public benefits. For example, a mother who picked up extra hours as a delivery person for Amazon found the additional income meant she no longer qualified for free child care saying, “The cost of daycare can make working redundant.”

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<sup>19</sup> *2Gen approach*. Ascend at the Aspen Institute. (2023, March 8). Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/2gen-approach/>

For young parents who are overwhelmed and stressed about how to meet their families' basic needs, providing access to flexible financial support is key. However, while Parent Advisors voiced general support for cash assistance programs and guaranteed income pilots, they shared concerns about the benefits cliff, which causes families to lose important benefits when their income increases even marginally. As initiatives work to increase access to cash for young families, they must include provisions that safeguard families from losing existing benefits.

- **High housing costs.** Young parents feel stuck between paying high rents for apartments and not being able to buy a house due to financial barriers and a shifting real estate market. Native parents face the added challenge of finding suitable housing that is close to their Tribal community. The NM Mortgage Finance Authority (MFA) offers low-interest mortgage loans and down payment assistance to first-time homebuyers who meet income and credit requirements, as well as options for making a lower down payment and closing cost assistance.<sup>20</sup> Albuquerque also offers an affordable home ownership program.<sup>21</sup> However, market forces, low wages, and other systemic issues in the banking and finance sectors make homeownership impossible for many young parents.
- **Transportation.** Parent Advisors pointed to transportation as a barrier to accessing multiple systems and being able to easily navigate child care, work, school, medical appointments, grocery shopping, and other basic needs. Parents who do not own a vehicle face an unreliable public transportation system. As one parent noted: *“The only bus that passes by where I work comes three times a day and it's not the time I need to get there or leave. . . Transportation in Albuquerque is a big conversation that needs more dialogue. The bus is now free, but the bus routes are limited. We need to work on expanding times and routes, especially in the South Valley and Westgate.”*
- **Need for financial literacy classes.** Parent Advisors pointed to a need for information on economic topics ranging from how to apply for and manage credit to applying for scholarships to establishing a family budget. One parent noted that members of Tribal communities are not able to own property, making it difficult to acquire equity.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://housingnm.org/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.cabq.gov/family/services/housing-services-programs/housing-public-services/affordable-housing> and launched a housing forward program

## Breakthroughs: Building Economic Assets

- **Child Savings accounts.** [Prosperity Kids Child Development Accounts](#) give children from limited-income households \$100 to start a savings account and match additional contributions up to an additional \$200 per year. When the child is 18-years-old, they can use money for education or job training and at age 23, they can use it for whatever they want. Parents also complete 10 weeks of financial capability and parent-child development education — including how to start a supplementary emergency savings fund to further stabilize the household. Children who are enrolled in and leverage their Child Savings Accounts are four-to-six times more likely to attend college or some form of postsecondary education and three-and-a-half times more likely to earn a college degree.
- **Housing assistance.** [The Santa Fe Community Housing Trust](#) and the [Sawmill Community Land Trust](#) offer special land and mortgage options to New Mexico families with low incomes in an effort to make home buying more affordable.
- **Transportation supports.** Programs like the [Job Access and Reverse Commute](#) and the [Rio Metro ACCESS](#) provide funding for free or reduced cost transportation to help individuals with low incomes get to work and medical appointments.
- **Tax reform.** In 2019, the New Mexico legislature passed changes to the tax code that are projected to put an additional \$2 billion into low and middle income households between 2020 and 2024.<sup>22</sup> These changes included a tax credit for families with children; a low income tax rebate; a child tax credit; cash payments during the pandemic, including to undocumented immigrants; and additional tax deductions for New Mexican families with dependents.

## Parent Advisor Recommendations

- Include more financial literacy courses in middle school and high school curriculum to help people learn how to manage finances at an early age. Bring in bankers and financial advisors to the schools to lead these courses.
- Offer financial literacy classes for parents. One Parent Advisor called on a need to shift the “traditional taboo on talking about money” among Hispanic families and instead “make it a common practice to talk about money and responsible spending with your family.”

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nmvoices.org/archives/16870>

## Health and Mental Health

For families to thrive, children and the adults in their lives must have safe and healthy environments, sound nutrition, and access to high-quality care for physical and mental health. Mental, physical, and behavioral health are critical components of the 2Gen approach, which recognizes that factors such as childhood trauma and economic support are important social determinants of health. Federal and state healthcare and coverage policies can pose barriers as well as opportunities to supporting families' well-being.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the challenges outlined in previous sections – including access to transportation, scheduling conflicts, and siloed care systems – also create barriers for young parents accessing health services for themselves and their children. Additionally, Parent Advisors expressed frustration with how they are treated by health care professionals, noting that they do not feel listened to and believe they are often dismissed due to their age, race, and/or gender. Several parents described a societal stigma of being a young parent as having an impact on their relationship with the health care system.

*“My daughter is disabled . . . and needs a lot of resources. It was really hard trying to figure out what was going on with my daughter and not having anybody listen to me, because I was a young parent. When young parents have an issue with their kids, and don't know what's going on, the first response of a lot of people is, ‘well, you should have waited until you were older.’” - Ascend Parent Advisor*

Reports suggest as many as 300,000 additional New Mexico residents have healthcare coverage as a result of the initial Medicaid expansion following passage of the Affordable Care Act combined with the second expansion under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act in 2020.<sup>24</sup> Still, New Mexico's uninsured rate for children is 6 percent, ranking the state 36th nationally. The uninsured rate among Native American children is 11.6 percent.<sup>25</sup> More recently, as a result of the 2021 American Rescue Plan, New Mexico extended postpartum care for up to a year after birth. Free and universal home visiting slots have also increased significantly in recent years, and prenatal care rates have held constant over the last two years. However, young parents often do not know how to access these supports. Parent Advisors described experiencing postpartum depression and some said they continue to feel a sense of isolation and struggle to find support. As one parent noted.

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<sup>23</sup> 2Gen approach. Ascend at the Aspen Institute. (2023, March 8). Retrieved March 23, 2023, from <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/2gen-approach/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.healthinsurance.org/states/new-mexico/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NM-KidsCountDataBook-2022.pdf>



*“It’s so hard when you are a new parent and . . . go through postpartum depression. We might have heard of it, but we don’t know if that’s what’s going on.”*

Despite increasing access to healthcare for pregnant people, inequities persist – especially when it comes to access to prenatal care for teens and a consistent trend of low birth weight among African American and Black babies. While the rate of low birthweight babies is 8.4 percent for Non-Hispanic whites, the rate for African American or Black babies is 14 percent, the highest rate when disaggregated by race/ethnicity.<sup>26</sup>

## Challenges

In discussions about accessing health and mental health treatment for themselves and their families, Parent Advisors in New Mexico raised the following challenges:

- **Access to information about health services.** Parent Advisors cited their pediatrician and social media sites, including Facebook Groups and paid advertisements, as top sources of information about available services. One parent noted, “There is a lack of knowledge about what services are available.”
- **Timely access to mental health services.** After 15 mental health providers shut down in 2013, the state is still working to rebuild its mental health capacity.<sup>27</sup> Several Parent Advisors lifted up the importance of mental health services to help young parents achieve their personal goals and better support their children – this included identifying postpartum depression more quickly. As one parent who discussed postpartum depression noted, “*A lot of times we catch it a little too far in, and we’ve already had that detachment from our babies because we didn’t catch it earlier or we didn’t seek the help earlier.*”
- **Services must be culturally appropriate.** Parent Advisors discussed the need for medical and mental health services that are aligned with various cultural beliefs, including Native and immigrant communities.

## Breakthroughs: Health and Mental Health

- **Expanding access.** [New Mexico Together for Healthcare](#) is a statewide, multiracial campaign of families and community organizations working together to strengthen healthcare access for all of New Mexico’s children and families, including immigrants,

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nmvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/NM-KidsCountDataBook-2022.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.kff.org/statedata/mental-health-and-substance-use-state-fact-sheets/new-mexico/>

by bringing down healthcare costs and expanding coverage throughout the state.

- **Culturally appropriate care.** To promote culturally appropriate care, the University of New Mexico offers courses on [curandesimo](#) and hosts an annual conference that brings together traditional healers from around the world. Organizations like [Changing Woman Initiative](#) and [Tewa Women United](#) promote and offer midwifery, doula, and other reproductive health and birthing services more aligned to traditional Indigenous practices and culture. [Centro Savila](#) offers programs targeted toward underserved immigrant communities. It is one of the only organizations in the state solely focused on improving the mental health of immigrants.
- **Addressing inequities in healthcare.** [New Mexico Breastfeeding Task Force](#) (NMBFT) and [Black Health New Mexico](#) advocate on behalf of BIPOC parents to ensure the healthcare sector promotes policies and practices that address maternal and child health inequities. Through its [Baby Friendly Hospital](#) initiative, the NMBTF is working with hospitals to increase breastfeeding initiation rates and support for breastfeeding parents postpartum.

### **Parent Advisor Recommendations**

- Parents noted that the geographic size of the state coupled with a lack of public and affordable transportation makes accessing services challenging. They recommended creating more ‘one-stop shops’ where young parents can access a range of resources – from early childhood care information to workforce developing training. As one parent noted, “There should be a place to go to get all of this information, so we do not have to solve this puzzle in the dark.”
- Fund **tele-consult and tele-health programs** that connect parents to medical and mental health staff that specialize in pre- and post-natal care. Making appointments available on line or over the phone will help reduce appointment wait times and ensure families and their children seek medical attention in a timely manner.

## **Social Capital**

To thrive and move ahead in life, both adults and children need connections to people and information, along with opportunities to both give and receive support. This includes contact with family, friends, and neighbors; participation in community and faith-based organizations; leadership and empowerment programs; and mental health services. Social capital builds on the strengths and resilience of families and bolsters the aspirations parents have for themselves and their children. Evidence suggests that developing social

capital contributes to a range of benefits for families, from improving parents' well-being to increasing children's regular school attendance and overall success in school

The stresses of unresolved trauma, poverty, racism, patriarchy, ageism, and colonization throughout our society have a profound impact on young parents, especially those of color. Parent Advisors described a host of ways in which these constructs impact their interactions with the healthcare, educational, and employment sectors. One parent described how these stressors stem from the narratives surrounding young parents, which are generally negative and difficult to overcome.

*“People think we wanted to become young parents. . . that it was a choice that we made and now we have to live with the consequences. Being a young parent has a negative connotation. I felt ashamed. Walking through high school pregnant with my bump showing, I wanted to hide it. And I didn't want to be singled out as the teen mom.”*

*– Parent Advisor, New Mexico*

Parent Advisors noted that their approach to building social connections shifted after they became parents and cited a need to build relationships with other young parents who understand what they are going through. But, they said it can be challenging to reach out to new people while juggling all the time commitments of a typical day. Parents, especially moms, shared that they sometimes feel isolated and lack a healthy amount of contact with friends, peers, and others who can relate and be supportive.

The relationships Parent Advisors developed with one another over the course of this analysis emphasize the value parents can play for one another when it comes to building a sense of community through shared experiences, challenges, and support. During the various convenings and focus groups, parents consistently shared the names of programs, case managers, and resources with one another and discussed opportunities to stay connected moving forward. When asked about their favorite part about being a Parent Advisor in an exit survey, Parent Advisors responded with:

*“Being able to express my concerns as a young mom and actually feel heard.”*

*“Communicating with other parents who are in the same boat and our voices being heard.”*

*“Gaining connections to resources and with other parents who shared a similar story to mine.”*

All the New Mexico Parent Advisors said they would like to stay connected with Ascend and participate in future opportunities.

In addition to other parents, community organizations offer social supports to young parents. For example, one parent worked with [Together for Brothers \(T4B\)](#) – a group focused on strengthening the leadership skills of boys and young men of color – to build his advocacy skills and join with other young people to successfully push for a city-wide policy that eliminated bus fares. He noted that the support, mentorship, and training he received from the organization continue to help him be an advocate for himself, his family, and his community.

Another parent described how the social capital she gained through the [New Mexico Asian Family Center \(NMAFC\)](#) helped her integrate into her community as a refugee by connecting her with resources to navigate child care, health care, and transportation systems. NMAFC also provided a welcoming community she continues to call upon as she and her family become more established in New Mexico.

## Challenges

When it comes to building social capital, Parent Advisors described these challenges:

- **Building social skills.** Parent Advisors discussed the need to build new relationships when they became parents and said it would be helpful to have resources to help build a support network and learn to ask for help. One parent noted, “We have a big responsibility as young parents. We have to learn how to ask for help. When it comes to “small things” it doesn't always feel like I am able to reach out for help.”
- **Internet access.** Many parents turn to Facebook and other social media platforms to ask for advice and form support groups. They appreciate the convenience of being able to connect with people any time of day and noted a need for reliable Internet to maximize this resource. Some parents also cited a need for help learning to use different virtual platforms.

## Breakthroughs: Social Capital

**Collaborative employment.** By organizing a poverty alleviation strategy, [Southwest Creations Collaborative's](#) initial aim was to create living wage employment for women from communities with low incomes. However, one Parent Advisor noted that in addition to help finding meaningful employment, the Collaborative provided a strong social network with other women who were experiencing similar challenges. Based in

Albuquerque, the Collaborative also provides college-readiness programs for employees' children, on-site child care, and leadership programs.

**Student support.** [New Mexico GRADS](#) is a school-based program aimed at providing a supporting environment that ensures teenage parents complete their education. In addition to completing traditional high school coursework, teen parents receive coaching on topics such as neonatal and teen parent health, financial literacy, and parenting skills while creating a supporting social network with one another. The program is funded through the New Mexico legislature and overseen by the state's public education department.

**Mentoring.** [Together for Brothers](#) (T4B) provides mentoring and leadership training to boys and young men of color. As participants build advocacy skills, they form bonds with one another while working together to improve their communities.

**Resources.** Founded by a circle of Asian women who came together to address the lack of culturally and linguistically tailored services for New Mexico's Pan-Asian community, [New Mexico Asian Family Center \(NMAFC\)](#) provides culturally sensitive programs and services to New Mexico's Pan-Asian community, including counseling and case management services, traditional methods of healing, youth and community leadership programs, financial education workshops, cross-racial movement building, and civic engagement work.

### Parent Advisor Recommendations

- **Build cohort strategies into existing programs.** Parent Advisors noted that they are part of postsecondary institutions, home visiting programs, and/or have children enrolled in early childhood sites that could more effectively engage them as part of groups/cohorts. Ideas ranged from formal programs (e.g. parent policy councils) to informal gatherings (e.g., weekly pizza nights to promote connection and conversation).
- **Reframe goals of existing programs to include social capital building as an outcome.** Most programs serving families with low incomes do not include social capital building as an explicit outcome. This is a missed opportunity. Parent Advisors noted that if policymakers and practitioners started including social capital building as an explicit measure of success in programs such as Home Visiting and a stackable credential training, more networking, supportive discussions, and shared experiences would occur. This has the potential to set off a cycle of connection and community that is engineered to improve families' lives.

## PLAN OF ACTION

New Mexico has an opportunity to achieve better outcomes for young parents and their children by partnering with young parents to embed transformative approaches across strategies, organizations, and systems through intentional leadership and by listening and responding to the voices of young parents and their families. Driven by Parent Advisors and validated by learnings from the input of community-rooted partners, the state-wide convenings, and the landscape analysis, a set of principles and lessons are emerging that make up a vision for 2Gen in New Mexico. The recommendations presented here are based on the experiences of young parents throughout the state and the solutions they say will improve their lives.

This Plan of Action identifies specific opportunities and recommendations for strengthening a 2Gen approach that embraces the experiences of multiple generations and acknowledges the various layers of family well-being. The following recommendations reflect input from Parent Advisors and other partners and are inspired by examples of promising approaches that are already underway throughout the state. These recommendations aim to assist stakeholders – including government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and private sectors – as they take steps to engage with young parents and implement changes aimed at fostering shared learning and success. We invite stakeholders in each of the categories to continue to engage with each other and to access the resources available through [Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#).

### Recommendations for Public Agencies Serving Families

***Incorporate parent voice into program and policy development and implementation.*** The realities faced by young parents are best articulated by the parents themselves. How young parents interact and engage with the policies, programs, and services meant to support them can be better understood by asking them directly. New Mexico Parent Advisors shared their experiences as young parents and provided invaluable insights to inform this process. Government agencies will benefit greatly by creating formal and established feedback loops into the efficacy of their programs informed by the perspectives of young parents. For example, in a meeting with members of the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet, the Parent Advisors made specific recommendations about the need for extended child care hours, improved public transportation, and improved access to services for children with disabilities. This type of feedback loop, such as a Family Voice Council, should be established as a formal and consistent part of shared decision-making across all state and local agencies.



***Include equity, economic mobility, mental health, and other indicators as measures of success for policy and programs.*** In 2018, with support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the City of Albuquerque established an [Office of Equity and Inclusion](#), restructuring its human and civil rights units and creating a new department that also includes the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, Office of Black Community Engagement, the Office of Native Affairs, and the Albuquerque Health Literacy program. The Office of Equity and Inclusion works to “inspire and equip city government to make Albuquerque a national role model of racial equity and social justice.” The City of Tucson also established an [Office of Equity](#) tasked with “informing all areas and functions in implementing equity-driven city policies, procedures, practices (stated and unstated), and legislation.” Additionally, New Mexico Governor Lujan Grisham established a [Council for Racial Justice](#) that aims to recommend action steps to end systemic racism and promote the fair and equal treatment of all people. These are a few examples of how government agencies can center equity and develop new indicators that speak to what is important to young families. For example, the state’s higher education department could conduct an equity audit of its postsecondary institutions and incentivize 2Gen partnerships with an equity lens.

At our November 2022 convening, Alvin Warren, Vice President of Career Pathways & Advocacy at the LANL Foundation, cited the 2Gen Empowerment Act, co-sponsored by Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM), as an important resource for local leaders. The federal bill, co-sponsored with Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), identifies a range of funding streams that can be used at the county, Tribal, and state level to support stronger collaborations between postsecondary and early childhood systems. Warren noted that there is the potential to create an Interagency Council among Cabinet leaders, Tribal leaders, and Parent Advisors to identify, guide, and hold accountable the use of blended funding streams for young parents and their children. This Interagency Council would have the potential to use linguistically-informed and culturally-responsive strategies to support whole families across the state.

## **Recommendations for Philanthropy**

***Fund collaborations and convenings to support community and statewide 2Gen approaches.***

Nonprofit organizations operate through a variety of collaborations and create interdependencies among one another that form ecosystems with a shared vision and goals. These ecosystems can be oriented to improve program delivery; build relationships among leaders; develop policy proposals; and form coalitions to advocate and lobby. They also provide high levels of differentiation and specialization, providing both a depth of expertise as well as the breadth needed to achieve the power to scale and effect

transformational change. These ecosystems provide the reach to engage diverse communities and stakeholders as well as the explicit and implicit agreements necessary for groups that might otherwise be disconnected to come together for a common cause.

This ecosystem approach drove recent legislative victories in New Mexico such as the [Land Grant Permanent Fund](#) and [Paid Sick Leave](#). Led by organizing and civic engagement groups, ecosystems of organizations and other stakeholder groups – based on geography (e.g. southern New Mexico), constituency base (e.g. immigrants, refugees), and professional groups (e.g. pediatricians) – engaged under a common banner to affect change. These same ecosystems are now focused on implementing these new policies.

For Foundations to effectively fund collaboratives among organizations, they must have a clear understanding of the coalitions, alliances, campaigns, and other collaborative formations behind them. Families and communities do not live their lives in neat philanthropic funding strategies. It is important for philanthropy to assess its funding strategies to ensure resources align with community needs. For example, there is an opportunity to create and fund a Data Collaborative for Young Parents in New Mexico that would align the Governor’s office, leaders managing Census data, leaders from Tribal organizations, and research institutions to better identify data gaps and build a system for more inclusive, equitable, and accurate data collection.

***Partner with government and Tribal government to support innovation.*** Throughout this process, participants cited numerous examples of innovative and experimental approaches to supporting young parents. Three noteworthy examples include: 1) the cohort of Parent Advisors who informed this process; 2) the [Santa Fe Community College Basic Income initiative](#); 3) the [Walatowa Head Start Program](#); and 4) the LANL Foundation’s Early Childhood Tribal Cohort.

In September 2021, the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe Community College launched a guaranteed income pilot project providing \$400 a month for a year to 186 students who were also young parents. Additional partners included [Mayors for a Guaranteed Income](#), [Santa Fe Community Foundation](#), Twitter founder Jack Dorsey, and individual donors. Several participants in this process cited this particular program as a comprehensive approach toward incorporating 2Gen principles and practices. It is also a useful solution to challenges to achieving postsecondary success raised by Parent Advisors. Layered on top of programs such as the New Mexico Opportunity Scholarship, which provides tuition-free college, the building blocks of a stronger support network for young parents with children begin to come together. This particular example was made possible through an innovative partnership among philanthropy, governmental agencies, and higher education.

With support from the [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#), the Pueblo of Jemez partnered with the federal government to transform its Head Start program and support the revitalization of the Towa language, the ancestral language of the Jemez Pueblo. The work stemmed from the Early Childhood Pueblo Outreach Project which was developed through a partnership between the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council (ENIPC) and the LANL Foundation's Early Childhood Program. Starting in May 2017, these groups worked together to strengthen commitment to support children and families in Pueblo communities. Through a community engagement process, Tribal leaders discovered that opportunities to learn the language and the preservation of culture of the Tribe are critical aspects of an early learning environment. As a result, the school's calendar, classroom, curriculum, and approach to instruction have been indigenized to reflect what parents want their children to learn.

***Lead with equity and universality for those most marginalized.*** Philanthropy made important commitments in the wake of the George Floyd murder, including prioritizing equitable funding for BIPOC-led and -serving organizations and communities. In New Mexico – a majority BIPOC state located along the US/Mexico border with a significant Tribal and Native presence – philanthropy can play an important role in modeling leadership that disrupts a status quo that is trending toward widening inequality. [A Demographic Analysis of Young Parents \(Ages 18-24\) and Their Families in New Mexico](#) reflects the need for any and all strategies to center equity so that young parents and their families have access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services.

By supporting approaches and outcomes that work for those who are most marginalized, philanthropy can model leadership for equity. Applying some of the principles of universal design (e.g., the principle of equitable use) will enable philanthropy to be a force for change that benefits all, especially for those who are most marginalized. One specific recommendation is to invest in intersectional research and inclusive data gathering that allows policymakers to collect and analyze data on whole families, including a variety of structures and backgrounds.

## **Recommendations for Nonprofit Organizations**

***Leverage the success of the Land Grant Permanent Fund campaign toward 2Gen approaches and collaboratives.*** In November 2022, New Mexicans voted to expand the Land Grant Permanent Fund (LGPF), New Mexico's constitutionally mandated education trust fund, to include expanded monetary support for early education programs. The move served as a catalyst and rallying point for early childhood advocates to promote the value of early

childhood care and education. Resourced by royalties from state land leases and investment income, the LGPF will provide K12 schools and universities \$1.34 billion in FY24.

The push for this policy change was a group effort led by equity-aligned leaders across sectors – including nonprofits, philanthropies, state government agencies, and some elected leaders – who came together around a coordinated strategy to provide greater support for families with low incomes, including families of color.

As advocates for the successful measure turn their attention to implementation, there is an opportunity to direct some of these resources toward parent engagement strategies, such as post secondary partnerships, home visiting programs with workforce development, and trauma-informed care training for early childhood providers, teachers, and community members. The moment is also ripe for refocusing the early childhood movement to include whole families while forming cross-sector collaboratives to promote policies and programs that support young parents, including housing, jobs, K-12 education, postsecondary education, and early childhood physical, social, and mental health.

***Work to expand mental health programs for immigrants, refugees, and families with children with disabilities.*** Even before the upheaval of the state’s mental health services in 2013, the state lacked mental health services tailored to the needs of immigrants and refugees as well as families with children with disabilities. To date, Centro Savila remains one of the only providers specializing in mental health services for immigrant families. The Parent Advisors shared stories of the stress that comes with not getting the help their families require and cited a need for providers who are able to address their families’ unique needs. Clinics like Centro Savila could be scaled around the state as lessons learned through its trauma-informed approach are shared with providers in early childhood settings and used to improve services offered in postsecondary settings.

***Continue including Tribes and Native communities in stakeholder engagement and program design.*** New Mexico is home to 23 sovereign Tribes, while major cities, including Albuquerque, boast even greater diversity among Native communities. Yet, sovereignty, capacity, funding, and other pervasive challenges often prevent the nonprofit sector from engaging with these important and significant stakeholders. The realities and lived experiences of Indigenous people living both on and off Tribal land are vital to developing solutions and community engagement strategies. During the most recent Census, nonprofit organizations, alongside state, local, and Tribal governments, took measures to ensure New Mexico’s Native people were counted both on and off of Tribal lands, including establishing a [statewide Complete Count Committee](#) with extensive Native and

Tribal representation. This approach could provide a model for including Tribes and Native communities in program design and policy solutions moving forward.

## Recommendations for Employers

***Translate young parents' needs into hiring practices and workplace policies.*** The Parent Advisors discussed at length employers' lack of understanding about the barriers young parents face in the workplace. As one Parent Advisor noted, "The gym offers child care, why can't my job offer it?" Parents and partners identified the important role that employers can play in accelerating innovation in areas such as child care, wages and benefits, transportation, and moving families toward economic security.

Given the outsized role young parents can play in the state's workforce, addressing this gap represents a significant opportunity to strengthen employer retention of young parent employees and in turn bolster the state's economy. Employers can support workers who are also young parents by understanding and incorporating the needs of young parents into their hiring and workplace policies. Parent Advisors pointed to on-site child care, predictable and accommodating scheduling, transportation, and living-wage pay and benefits as critical to allowing them to rejoin the workforce after having a child. By partnering with local governments and nonprofit organizations, employers can adapt successful programs in support of young parents and their transition back into the workplace. For example, a large employer could partner with a local government agency or nonprofit organization to establish an on-site child care center. Last year, the New Mexico Early Education and Care Department released [this report](#) detailing options for employees to better support working parents' child care needs.

New Mexico state agencies are leading the way in creating on-site child care options for employees. In 2022, New Mexico opened [two on-site child care centers for state employees](#), creating 52 new slots between them – a two percent increase in licensed child care available to Santa Fe employees. "The model we're using at these facilities is what we hope to see more of around the state. We want communities to see that they can forge these partnerships and create their own child care supply to meet the unique needs of their families and local economies – and the State of New Mexico will be an eager partner in these projects," said Early Childhood Education and Care Department Secretary Elizabeth Groginsky.

***Convene industry leaders to discuss ways of supporting young parent workers.*** As employees increasingly return to the workplace post COVID, now is an appropriate time to gather industry leaders to share strategies of supporting workers who are young parents. Many

workplaces have examined their salary and benefits to recruit and retain talented workers who are also parents of young children. Examples include on-site child care, flexible scheduling, tuition assistance, and time off policies that make it easier for parents to attend their children's school and health appointments.

Last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce offered a [Childcare Roadmap for Employers](#) that aimed to help employers attract and retain top talent by taking a holistic approach to workplace policies that better support working parents. The resource offers New Mexico employers several strategies for leveraging the workforce potential of the state's young parents.



# TEMPLATE FOR ASSESSING PLAN OF ACTION

Leveraging insights from the Collaborative Framework, the 2Gen Plan of Action is intended to provide a blueprint of actions that policymakers, practitioners, and philanthropy can take to better support young parents and their children and ultimately achieve better outcomes for young families in New Mexico. Use this template to assess the Plan of Action with tactics listed out by sector. Some activities can be addressed quickly, while others may require a multi-year commitment.

## Public Agencies Serving Families

Tactic	Activity	Action Steps	Responsible Organization or Agency/Dept.	Leads	Measure of Progress	Progress Update
<i>Incorporate parent voice into program and policy development and implementation.</i>						
<i>Include equity, economic mobility, mental health, and other indicators as measures of success for policy and programs.</i>						

**Philanthropy**

Tactic	Activity	Action Steps	Responsible Organization or Agency/Dept.	Leads	Measure of Progress	Progress Update
<i>Fund organizational collaboratives focused on 2Gen approaches.</i>						
<i>Partner with government and Tribal government to support innovation.</i>						
<i>Lead with equity and universality for those most marginalized.</i>						

**Nonprofit Organizations**

Tactic	Activity	Action Steps	Responsible Organization or Agency/Dept.	Leads	Measure of Progress	Progress Update
<i>Leverage the success of the Land Grant Permanent Fund campaign toward 2Gen focused collaboratives.</i>						
<i>Work to expand mental health programs for immigrants, refugees, and families with children with disabilities.</i>						
<i>Continue including Tribes &amp; Native communities in stakeholder engagement and program design.</i>						

**Private Sector**

Tactic	Activity	Action Steps	Responsible Organization or Agency/Dept.	Leads	Measure of Progress	Progress Update
<i>Implement young parents' needs into hiring practices and workplace policies.</i>						
<i>Convene industry leaders to discuss ways of supporting young parent workers.</i>						

## APPENDIX A: List of Strategy Group Members and Affiliations

- Jovanna Archuleta, Ascend Fellow, Assistant Secretary for Native Americans, NM Early Childhood Education & Care Department (became the Early Childhood Outreach Director at the LANL Foundation)
- Charlene Bencomo, Executive Director, Bold Futures New Mexico
- Kara Bobroff, Executive Director, One Gen Fund
- Claire Dudley Chavez, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Speaker Javier Martinez
- Rachel Kutcher, Student Parent Success Manager, Santa Fe Community College
- Ann Lyn Hall, CEO, Prosperity Works
- Adrian Pedroza, Ascend Fellow, Executive Director, Abriendo Puertas
- Elizabeth Kistin Keller, First Lady, Office of City of Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller
- Dr. Angela Owens, Director, Glass Family Research Institute for Early Childhood, NM State University
- Amber Wallin, Executive Director, NM Voices for Children

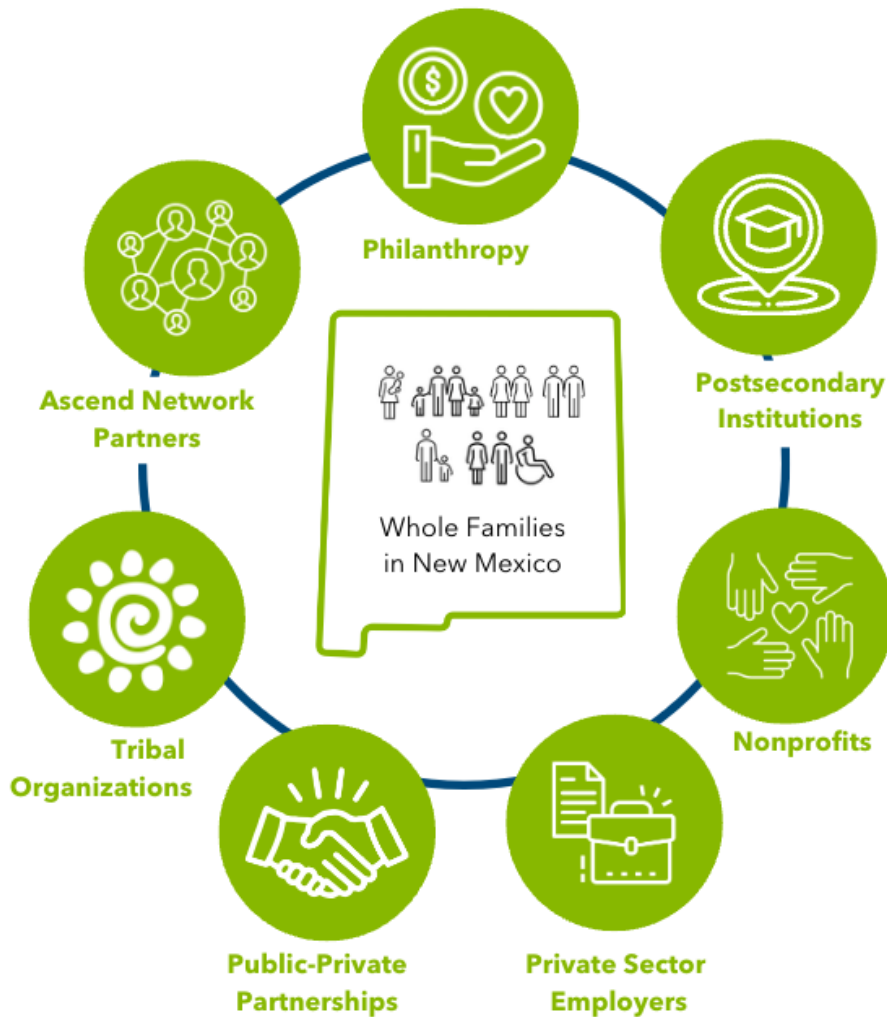
## APPENDIX B: List of Parent Advisors

First Name	Last Name	Nominating Organization
Maritza	Acosta	NM GRADS
Briyit	Arteaga	Encuentro
Nelson	Barranco	Together for Brothers
Chelsea	Bedah	Child and Family Development Center
Brandy	Boone	NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN)
Noelani	Charley	Black Leadership Council
Gustavo	Cisneros	NM GRADS
Loren	Crespin	Keres Children's Learning Center
Cindy	De La Rosa	Black Leadership Council
Vanessa	Eiland	Bold Futures NM
Daisia	Fuller	Centro Savila
Dashanti	Gipson	Future Focused
Fariha	Hakimi	NM Asian Family Center
Bahara	Kashmiri	NM Asian Family Center
Valeria	Martinez	Southwest Creations
Yarely	Quintana-Chavez	Abriendo Puertas/ ENLACE
Veronica	Ramirez	Tewa Women United
Angel	Ronquillo	Together for Brothers (T4B)
Levi	Shije	Indigenous Youth Council NM Indian Affairs Department
Francisco	Villasenor	NM GRADS



# APPENDIX C: Stakeholder Mapping in New Mexico

Below is an illustrative overview of partners in New Mexico which was developed with the support of consultants – Antionette Tellez-Humble (Tellez-Humble LLC), Robby Rodriguez (Robby Rodriguez LLC), and Claire Dudley-Chavez (Senior Policy Advisor, The Office of Speaker Javier Martinez) – as well as secondary sources including Groundworks New Mexico (Nonprofit); Capitol Impact (Postsecondary); Zippia (Private Sector); and The Grantsmanship Center (Philanthropy). This mapping of partners, while not comprehensive, is intended to be a starting point to consider how organizations can collaborate and streamline efforts to support families within the state within and across sectors.



## Philanthropy: Leading Foundations in the State

Akerson Family Foundation  
Albert I. Pierce Foundation  
Albuquerque Community Foundation  
Brindle Foundation  
Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation  
Chase Foundation  
Clark L. Tanner Foundation  
Coleman Family Foundation  
Community Foundation of Southern NM  
Con Alma Health Foundation  
Cudd Foundation  
Daniel's Fund  
Doris Goodwin Walbridge Foundation  
Eugene V. and Claire E. Thaw Charitable Trust  
Frederick H. Leonhardt Foundation  
Garfield Street Foundation  
H.B. and Lucille Horn Foundation  
Healy Foundation  
JF Maddox Foundation  
Johns Family Foundation  
Jonathan and Kathleen Altman Foundation  
Los Alamos National Laboratories (LANL) Foundation  
Lannan Foundation  
Max and Anna Levinson Foundation

McCune Family Foundation  
New Mexico Children's Foundation  
New Society Fund  
Notah Begay III Foundation  
Panter Foundation  
PNM Resources Foundation  
R.D. & Joan Dale Hubbard Foundation  
Robert T. Keeler Foundation  
Santa Fe Community Foundation  
SB Foundation  
St. Joseph's Community Health  
Taos Community Foundation  
The Albuquerque Rotary Charitable Foundation  
The Allene and Jerome Lapidus Foundation, Inc.  
The Frost Foundation, Ltd.  
The Gumbo Foundation  
The Marshall L. and Perrine D. McCune Charitable Foundation  
Thornburg Foundation  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation

## Postsecondary Institutions

Carrington College  
Central New Mexico Community College (CNM)  
Central NM Mesalands Community College

Clovis Community College  
Community Health Education and Resiliency Program  
Dine College  
Eastern NM University  
Institute of American Indian Arts  
Luna Community College  
Navajo Technical University  
New Mexico Appleseed  
New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
New Mexico School for the Deaf  
NM Highlands University  
NM Institute of Mining and Technology  
NM Junior College  
NM Military Institute  
NM State University  
NM Veterans Upward Bounds  
Northern NM College  
San Juan College  
Santa Fe Community College  
Sawmill Community Land Trust  
Southeast NM College  
Southwest Tribal NARCH (Native American Research Center for Health  
Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute

The Santa Fe  
Community Housing  
Trust  
University of New  
Mexico (UNM)  
Western NM University

### Nonprofits

All Faiths Children's  
Advocacy Center  
Carrie Tingley Hospital  
Foundation  
Center of Southwest  
Culture  
Centro Savila  
Childhaven  
Family Crisis Center  
Goodwill Industries of  
New Mexico  
Hands and Voices New  
Mexico Chapter  
Homewise  
Keres Children's  
Learning Center  
La Vida Felicidad  
LifeROOTS  
Little Forest Playschool  
Native American  
Professional Parent  
Resources (NAPPR)  
New Mexico Alliance for  
Children  
New Mexico Child First  
Network  
New Mexico Child First  
Network  
New Mexico Faith  
Coalition for Immigrant  
Justice  
New Mexico Solutions  
New Mexico Voices for  
Children  
NM Grads  
Northern New Mexico  
Birth Center

Northern New Mexico  
Regional Art Center  
(formerly Art Center at  
Fuller Lodge)  
Oasis Children's  
Advocate Center, The  
Ohkay Owingeh Boys  
and Girls Club  
Ohkay Owingeh Housing  
Authority  
Parents Reaching Out  
PATH (People Assisting  
the Homeless)  
PB&J Family Services  
Inc.  
People Helping People  
PeopleWorks - NM  
Planned Parenthood of  
the Rocky Mountains  
Prison Family Services  
Prosperity Works  
Reel Fathers  
Rural Housing, Inc.  
Sandstone Housing  
Santa Fe Dreamers  
Project  
Santa Fe for Students  
Santa Fe Youth and  
Family Center  
Consortium  
Shandiin Child  
Development Center  
Southwest Learning  
Centers  
Storydancer Project  
Strong Families New  
Mexico  
T. M. Family Foundation  
Tierra Contenta  
Corporation  
Together for Brothers  
United Way of Eastern  
New Mexico  
W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
Wings for LIFE

Working Classroom, Inc.  
YMCA of Central New  
Mexico

### Private Sector Employers

SunBridge Healthcare  
Corp  
Citizens Bank – NM  
Akal Security  
Khi Llc  
Presbyterian  
Los Alamos National  
Security LLC  
Los Alamos National  
Laboratory Foundation  
Los Alamos National  
Laboratory  
Sandia National Labs  
The University of New  
Mexico

### Public-Private Partnerships

New Mexico PreK  
NM Child Care  
Assistance Program  
New Mexico Early  
Childhood Funders  
Group  
New Mexico Health  
Equity Partnership  
NM Opportunity  
Scholarship  
Prosperity Works  
Homewise  
Santa Fe LEAP  
LANL Foundation

### Tribal Organizations (including Pueblos)

Acoma Pueblo  
Albuquerque Area Indian  
Health Board

Changing Woman Initiative  
Cochiti Pueblo  
Ft. Sill Apache Tribe  
Indigenous Youth Council, NM  
Department of Indian Affairs  
Isleta Pueblo  
Jemez Pueblo  
Keres Children's Learning Center  
Laguna Pueblo  
Mescalero Apache Tribe  
Nambe Pueblo  
Navajo Nation  
Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo  
Picuris Pueblo  
Pojoaque Pueblo  
San Felipe Pueblo  
San Ildefonso Pueblo  
Sandia Pueblo  
Santa Ana Pueblo  
Santa Clara Pueblo  
Santo Domingo Pueblo  
Taos Pueblo  
Tesuque Pueblo  
Tewa Women United  
Walatowa Head Start  
Zia Pueblo  
Zuni Pueblo  
Western Indian Ministries  
Southwestern Association for Indian Arts  
Southwest Neighborhood Housing Services

Saranam  
Northern Pueblos Housing Authority  
Navajo Partnership for Housing  
Native American Professional Parent Resources (NAPPR)  
Native American Disability Law Center  
Native American Community Academy  
Five Sandoval Indian Pueblos LLC  
All Pueblo Council of Governors  
Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Council

**Nonprofit Community Partners of Ascend (Network Partners & Planning Committee)**

Abriendo Puertas  
Black Leadership Council  
Bold Futures New Mexico  
Central New Mexico Community College  
Centro Savila  
Child & Family Development Center  
Early Childhood Education Center for Excellence at Santa Fe  
Community College

Encuentro  
Future Focused Education  
Generation Justice  
Growing Up New Mexico  
Indigenous Youth Council, NM  
Department of Indian Affairs  
Keres Children's Learning Center  
La Plaza de Encuentro  
Gathering Place  
NACA Inspired Schools Network  
New Mexico Asian Family Center  
New Mexico Fairness Project and State Priorities Partnership led by NM Voices for Children  
NM GRADS  
Partnership for Community Action  
Prosperity Works  
Santa Fe Community Foundation  
Saranam LLC  
Southwest Creations Collaborative  
Southwest Creations Collaborative: Hacia  
Toward the University  
Tewa Women United  
Together for Brothers  
United Way of North Central New Mexico



Ascend at the Aspen Institute is a catalyst and convener for diverse leaders working across systems and sectors to build intergenerational family prosperity and well-being by intentionally focusing on children and the adults in their lives together. We believe in the power of co-creation. We are a community of leaders – well-connected, well-prepared, and well-positioned – building political will that transforms hearts, minds, policies, and practices.

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