PARENTING STUDENTS REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS – STATE

* Convene institutional leaders and other stakeholders to address needs of parenting students. States should convene leaders in higher education, social services, and mental physical health care to explore the needs of parenting students, particularly disadvantaged parents of color. It is important to include students’ voices, as well as the voices of student organizations that include parenting students of color.
* Require institutions to collect and report information on parenting students. States should require colleges and universities to collect demographic information on parenting students, as well as questions regarding their basic needs. Questions may cover the age of dependent children, current childcare arrangements, and receipt of subsidized child care and other benefits.[[1]](#footnote-1) In 2021, Oregon passed a law requiring the state Higher Education Coordinating Commission to identify and collect information on parenting students on annual forms used to collect demographic information by public universities and community colleges. This information will enable institutions to tailor supportive services and referrals more effectively to students, and will also enable state and local government agencies to identify and target resources to meet the needs of parenting students.
* Review state financial aid programs to identify and overhaul policies that discriminate against parenting students. States should identify provisions of financial aid policy that may have a strongly negative effect on the ability of parenting students to receive financial aid. Financial aid programs limited to recent high school graduates, for example, exclude parenting students who are likely to take off a year or more after high school to care for young children. Programs available only to full-time students exclude parents who balance parenting and work responsibilities by enrolling part-time in college. Conducting a full-spectrum review, with input from parenting students and support organizations such as Generation Hope, will enable policymakers to restructure their financial aid programs to recognize and support parenting students.
* Prioritize parenting students for receipt of federal childcare funding. The largest source of public funding for child care is the federal Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), a funding stream authorized by the Child Care Development Block Grant. CCDF provides child care assistance to low-income families for children under the age of 13 while parents work or attend school. States should use their considerable autonomy over copays, subsidy levels, priority populations, contracting procedures, work requirements, and other program elements to elevate parenting students as a priority population. Parenting students face child care challenges unique to higher education, and public child care support structures should recognize and address those challenges.
* Allow parenting students on public assistance to substitute college study for work requirements. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program emphasizes work at the expense of college study, imposing a 20-hour/week work requirement that can make it effectively impossible for many students to enroll full-time in college and receive much-needed cash assistance. However, states have discretion to designate education and training programs as “core activities”, exempting them from work requirements, for up to 12 months. However, some states have not taken advantage of this option. States should use TANF to provide supports for parenting students seeking short-term credentials that prepare them for the skilled labor market. They should also consider using state dollars to support degree-seeking students after the 12-month period ends.

1. Reichlin Cruse, L., Richburg-Hayes, L., Hare, A., and Contreras-Mendez, S. (October 2021). Evaluating the role of campus child care in student parent success: Challenges and opportunities for rigorous study. Institute for Women’s Policy Research. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)