

Statement of Support for Efforts to Improve and Institutionalize Student Parent Data Collection

Institute for Women's Policy Research

January 2021

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is committed to promoting the success of college students with dependent children, who both stand to [gain substantially](#) from, and face enhanced barriers to, college attainment. Though national data show that [nearly one quarter](#) of U.S. undergraduates are raising dependent children, data on the number of students who are parents [are sparse or nonexistent](#) at the state and institutional levels, creating an unfortunate blind spot in our ability to improve student outcomes. With growing interest in enhancing equity in postsecondary success, complete data on students' parent status that can be disaggregated by race/ethnicity and other key characteristics is essential to understanding student outcomes, targeting supports and services, and measuring what works to promote equitable student parent enrollment, persistence, and completion.

Student parents face distinct challenges to college success, including high rates of economic insecurity, significant caregiving demands, and insufficient financial and child care support, that can affect their college outcomes. Nationally, [just 37 percent](#) of student parents graduate within six years, compared with nearly 60 percent of students without children. Students of color in college are [more likely to be parents](#) and also more likely to stop out before graduation. Nearly two in five student parents are single parents, the large majority of whom live in or near poverty.

Comprehensive student parent data collection at the state and institutional levels, including information on whether students are caring for dependent children and the ages of those children, is crucial to understanding multiple and intersecting educational inequities that exist within higher education systems and to establishing policy and practice that benefits all students. Such information is also central to understanding changes in enrollment and graduation rates during times of social and economic upheaval, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initiatives and legislation that encourage and establish mechanisms for the collection of institutional data on students with caregiving responsibilities can help achieve goals of racial, ethnic, gender, and class equity within postsecondary education. IWPR supports efforts at the institutional, state, and national levels that seek to improve our understanding of student parents through better access to data on this student population and their educational journeys.