GENERATION HOPE

> "If colleges would support student parents and say 'we get it,' that would impact everything — grades, attendance, even other teen parents like me believing higher education is possible."
>
> EMILY, GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

NATIONAL STUDENT-PARENT SURVEY RESULTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Uncovering the Student-Parent Experience and Its Impact on College Success

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

imaginable futures

Chegg.org

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

THE hope CENTER
For College, Community, and Justice

CONTENTS

NOTE ON REPORT FOCUS

Generation Hope's national student-parent survey contributes to the growing conversation around student parents by providing a window into their college experience. Thanks to organizations such as the Institute for Women's Policy Research; Ascend at the Aspen Institute; and The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, the body of demographic research about student parents is steadily building.

And yet, with not enough national and institutional data being collected about student parents, and many students being reluctant to share their parenting status for fear of being treated differently or due to the persistent stigma around teen parenthood, information about the daily higher ed experiences of this population is hard to come by. That challenge is echoed in the fact that our national survey, which welcomed input from past and present student parents, did not achieve a statistically significant sample size. It does, however, have strong geographic diversity, a racially-representative sample (see Methodology), and data from student parents who attend two-year, four-year, and graduate schools. For the purposes of this survey, we define "student parent" as a student who is a parent or guardian of any biological, adopted, step, or foster children living in their household part or full time.

This snapshot of the student-parent experience provides abundant opportunities for institutions to enhance their support for students with children (see Conclusion and Recommendations), as well as a call to action. We hope that it spurs widespread data collection at the national level and by individual schools and deeper conversations about how to best support their parenting population and other marginalized students with whom this population frequently overlaps.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After ten years of working with teen parents to earn their college degrees at 21 different institutions in the Washington, D.C. metro area (D.C., Maryland, and Virginia), Generation Hope is elevating the experience of parenting college students nationwide. This report describes the results of a survey administered across the United States in the winter and spring of 2020. The insights gathered here reflect 259 student parents attending 147+ colleges and universities across the country.

RESPONDENTS REVEAL

> " I feel like I have no guide. I feel like there is no one like me walking around campus."

NEARLY HALF of respondents said that as student parents they felt somewhat disconnected or very disconnected from their college community

21% were somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable disclosing their parenting status to professors

MORE THAN 1 IN 3 of respondents did not see any family-friendly characteristics on their campuses

29% NEARLY A THIRD of both community college parenting students and four-year parenting students indicated seeing no family-friendly characteristics on their campuses

NEARLY 60% did not know if there is a campus policy on whether they can bring their children to class

ONLY 3% indicated their campus had a policy that allowed them to bring their children to class

RESPONDENTS REVEAL

MORE THAN 60% of respondents missed between 1 and 5+ days of class in their last semester due to lack of child care

75% of respondents said that their financial aid office did not inform them that childcare expenses could be taken into account in the determination of their financial aid award

ONLY 49% of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed that they knew who to talk to if they believed they were being discriminated against due to their parenting status, which is protected under Title IX

These findings also reveal distinct issues that reinforce the gaps in post-secondary attainment for Black and Hispanic or Latino students, who are 14 to 20 percentage points less likely than White students to earn at least a bachelor's degree[i]. Since parenting students are more likely to be students of color, higher ed policies and practices for this population must be viewed and implemented through a racial-equity lens.

Generation Hope's quest to provide a more accurate picture of student parents' higher ed experiences began in the fall of 2019 when we surveyed our Scholars and alumni, all current or former teen parents in college in the D.C. metro area. The results highlighted clear gaps in support for college students with children with implications for colleges, policy makers, and advocates to ensure they are able to persist toward their degree. We wanted to see if these gaps were reflected in the experiences of student parents across the country.

GENERATION HOPE offers technical assistance for colleges across the country that would like to expand their capacity to serve student parents. If you are interested in this support, please contact us at **info@supportgenerationhope.org**

ANA
GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

INTRODUCTION

WHILE MORE THAN 1 IN 5[ii] OF TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS ARE PARENTS,

they continue to be an invisible population at most institutions. The vast majority of institutions do not track parenting status and therefore do not know how many student parents they have at any given time. Because not all students complete it, the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) does not provide an accurate count of student parents even though students can indicate dependents on the form. Additionally, parenting status is not included on most college enrollment forms or tracked on an ongoing basis. Even in the absence of institution-specific data, colleges must recognize that student parents make up a significant number of students pursuing postsecondary credentials (26% of two-year students, 20% of private non-profit four-year students, and 12% of public four-year students)[iii], and that this population intersects with various other marginalized groups, such as low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students. In order for colleges to recruit and retain more students and increase their completion rates, gaining insights on the student-parent experience is crucial.

Student parents are not a monolith — they represent a diverse spectrum of lived experiences. However, we do have demographic data that assist in telling their story. The largest share of student parents — 42%[iv] — attend community colleges; student parents are more likely[v] than their non-parenting peers to have low incomes; 51%[vi] of student parents are students of color; just under 60% of student parents are first-generation college students (defined as their parents having some college but no degree, or less); **and they tend to have higher GPAs[vii] than their non-parenting peers.** When a student parent earns their degree, it has ripple effects that span two generations. Their children have a better chance[viii] at achieving academic and career success themselves when their parents earn a postsecondary credential. Furthermore, the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) reports[ix] that a single mother who earns her bachelor's degree can expect[x] to earn over $625,000 more than the lifetime earnings of single mothers who only earn a high school diploma. A single mother who earns her associate's degree will earn about $256,000 more than a single mother who only finished high school.

Nationwide, outcomes for student parents have significant room for improvement. Between 2011–12 and 2015–16, the share of students who were parents declined by 15% and the total number declined by 20%. While enrollment among all undergraduates decreased in that time (by roughly 6%), the number of college students who are parents dropped[xi] more sharply than among students overall. An estimated 52% of undergraduate student parents left school without a degree within six years, compared to 32% of students without children[xii].

With the invaluable support of our partners **Imaginable Futures**; **Chegg.org**; the **Institute for Women's Policy Research**; **The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice**, Generation Hope designed this national survey to be a resource for college administrators, faculty, trustees, students, community organizations, policymakers, and advocates who are dedicated to learning more about and advocating for this largely invisible student population. These findings present a striking national snapshot of the barriers that student parents face, focusing on institutional policies, physical space, and culture that contribute to student-parent success. The data also inform the guidance and recommendations presented on page 20 for higher ed policies and practices that will move the needle on completion for this population as well as institutional measures of success, including enrollment, retention, and graduation rates.

Better meeting the needs of parenting students is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Each institution can enhance their services in their own way utilizing some underlying best practices to ensure this population is thriving. Additionally, **this work requires more than just a program or a childcare center but rather an institution-wide lens that considers the needs of student parents in the implementation of all its services.**

SNAPSHOT OF RESPONDENTS

RACE/ETHNICITY

Because this data is not a representative data set, the distribution of parents by race and ethnicity does not perfectly align with what we know about the student-parent population nationally. For a more accurate breakdown, please refer to our methodology.

Due to the small sample sizes, we have created a category that includes Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander, but we recognize that student parents of each of these backgrounds have unique experiences that are important to understand.
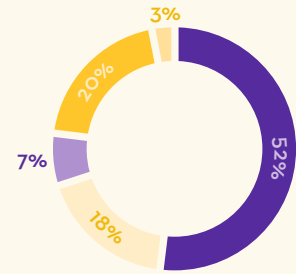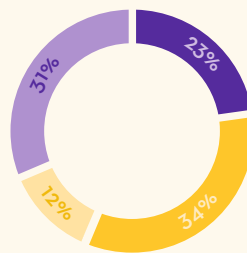
3%
52%
18%
7%
20%

- Caucasian or White
- Asian, AI/AN, PI
- Other
- African American or Black
- Hispanic or Latino

GENDER IDENTITY

1% 1%
22%
76%
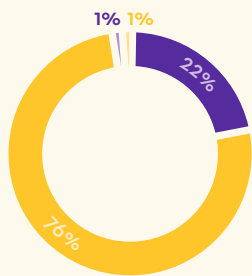
- Male
- Female
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say
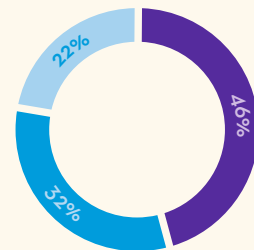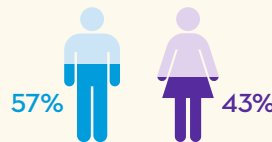- ⊗ Non-binary/third-gender (0%)

LOCATION

23%
31%
34%
12%

- Northeast
- South
- Midwest
- West

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Nearly 80% of respondents indicated either full- or part-time employment while in school.

80%

46% EMPLOYED FULL TIME

32% EMPLOYED PART TIME

MORE MALE RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY ARE WORKING FULL TIME

57%   43%

22%
46%
32%

- Employed full-time
- Not employed
- Employed part-time

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

39%

RESPONDENTS HAD A HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF

$34,499

OR BELOW

Income	Percent
$19,999 or below	22%
$20,000–$34,499	17%
$34,500–$49,999	16%
$50,000–$64,499	10%
$65,000–$74,999	5%
$75,000–$84,499	6%
$85,000–$99,999	3%
$100,000 or above	12%
Prefer not to answer	9%
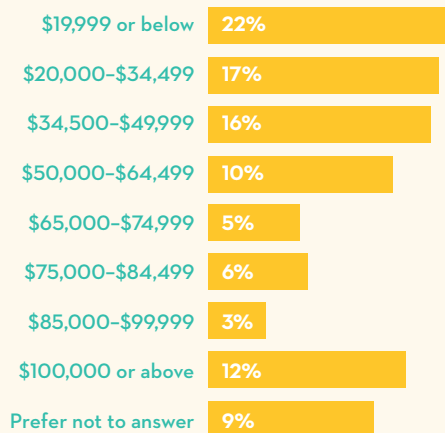
"I receive a small amount in food stamps, and I access the food pantry on campus. We rarely make it through the month without help from family members."

AGE OF CHILD(REN)

50%

Nearly half of all respondents juggled raising young children while working on their post-secondary credential, which speaks to the need for more affordable childcare options for parenting college students. For specific groups, this need is even more acute — the majority of Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander students had children younger than elementary school (59%), and the majority of Hispanic or Latino students had children in elementary school (60%).

|	
Younger than elementary school	43%
Elementary school	46%
Middle school	17%
High school	19%
College	14%
Graduate school	2%
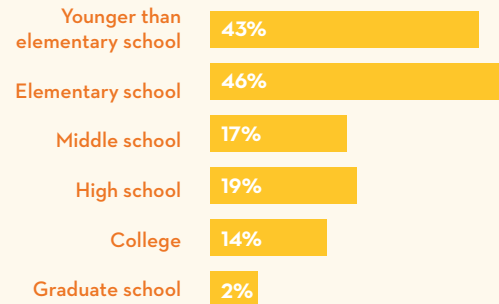
TYPE OF CHILD CARE

42%

Respondents indicated that cost was the most influential factor in their choice of child care. The most popular form of child care was a family member or a friend (40%), most likely due to the reduced cost. Only 8% of respondents use campus-based child care — and that percentage drops by half for African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino respondents (4% for each) compared to 11% for White students.

Home-based	12%
Family member or a friend	40%
Campus-based	8%
Community-based	22%
Nanny	2%
Drop-in care	7%
Other	21%
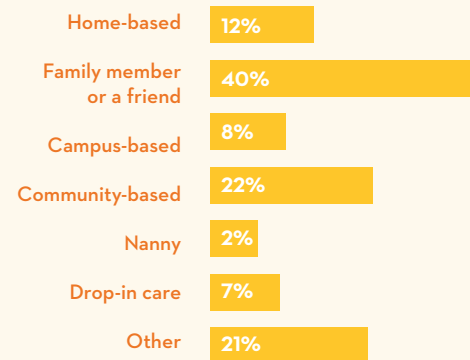
RELATIONSHIP STATUS

While nearly half of respondents were married or in a domestic partnership (49%), African American or Black, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino students were more likely to be single parents. Male student parents were also more likely to be married or in a domestic partnership — 72% compared to 43% of females. Parenting students in graduate school and in four-year schools were also more likely to be married or in a domestic partnership — 73% and 48%, respectively, compared to 33% of community college parenting students.

3%
10%
23%
15%
49%
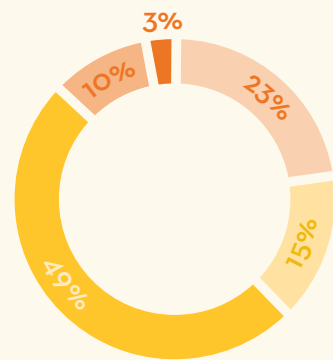
- Single
- In a relationship
- Married or domestic partnership
- Divorced
- Prefer not to answer
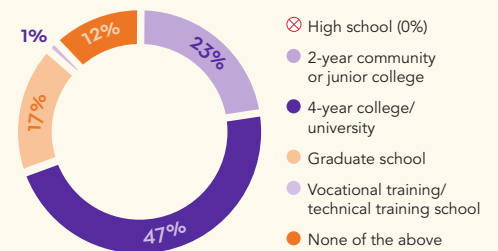
SNAPSHOT OF RESPONDENTS (CONT.)

FAMILY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

The majority — more than 60% — of respondents' parents did not have an associate's degree or higher, meaning that most are the first in their families to earn a post-secondary credential. The most glaring disparity in parental education levels was for Hispanic or Latino parenting students, 82% of whom indicated that neither of their parents had an associate's degree or above.

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Mother/Parent 1						
Less than high school	17%	15%	6%	6%	38%	11%
High school diploma	25%	30%	13%	6%	25%	22%
Some college	19%	17%	26%	0%	19%	0%
Associate's Degree (2yr)	7%	8%	11%	6%	4%	11%
Bachelor's Degree	17%	16%	15%	58%	9%	22%
Master's Degree	12%	12%	26%	24%	5%	11%
Ph.D./Doctorate	2%	1%	2%	0%	0%	11%
Not sure	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	12%
Father/Parent 2						
Less than high school	20%	13%	6%	18%	51%	11%
High school diploma	27%	31%	31%	6%	23%	33%
Some college	14%	17%	23%	0%	8%	15%
Associate's Degree (2yr)	7%	8%	2%	12%	4%	11%
Bachelor's Degree	13%	12%	9%	47%	9%	11%
Master's Degree	6%	7%	6%	6%	0%	11%
Ph.D./Doctorate	5%	6%	6%	6%	0%	0%
Not sure	8%	6%	17%	5%	5%	8%

TYPE OF SCHOOL*

Nearly half of the respondents attended a four-year school, which is not representative of the larger student-parent population. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, the largest share of student parents is enrolled in community colleges (42% of all student parents are community college students). However, we have disaggregated data by school type to provide a clear picture of the differences and similarities between student-parent experiences at each type of institution.
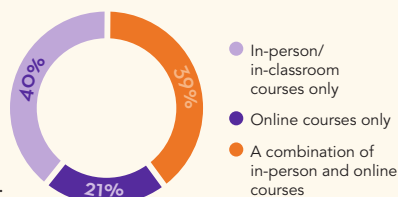

- ⊗ High school (0%)
- 2-year community or junior college
- 4-year college/ university
- Graduate school
- Vocational training/ technical training school
- None of the above

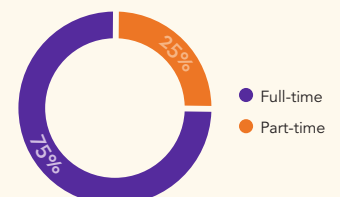(chart values: 1%, 12%, 23%, 47%, 17%)

HOW FAR ALONG IN ACADEMIC CAREER?

▶ For 2-year students, 22% were first-year students, and 78% were second year and beyond

▶ For 4-year students, 4% were first year/Freshman, 14% were second year/ Sophomore, 33% were third year/Junior, and 50% were fourth year/Senior and beyond

TYPE OF INSTRUCTION

More male parenting students indicated that they took classes online only — 30% compared to 19% of female respondents.

(chart values: 40%, 39%, 21%)

- In-person/ in-classroom courses only
- Online courses only
- A combination of in-person and online courses

FULL-TIME VS PART-TIME STUDENTS

(chart values: 25%, 75%)

- Full-time
- Part-time

*Due to small sample size, we could not provide sufficient information on the parenting-student experience at vocational training/technical training schools. We do recognize that this population has a unique experience that requires further exploration.

ANA
GENERATION HOPE
SCHOLAR

"

It was the professors who were curious about my life and who allowed me to bring my son to class who were most helpful."

NEARLY

60%

DIDN'T KNOW IF THERE WAS A CAMPUS POLICY ON BRINGING CHILDREN TO CLASS

ONLY

3%

KNEW THEIR CAMPUS HAD A POLICY ALLOWING THEM TO BRING THEIR CHILDREN TO CLASS

SURVEY FINDINGS

Higher education institutions and advocates are increasingly focused on better addressing the needs of first-generation and low-income students, and while many student parents intersect and overlap with these groups, collectively, parenting students have needs that remain largely invisible. These findings detail the gaps in support for student parents as reported by survey respondents, which are aligned with the experiences of the Scholars Generation Hope works with every day.

Findings are broken down by how student parents interact with policies, physical space, and culture and how each of these either contribute to or hinder their success.

INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES

Institutional policies are critical in communicating whether parenting students are welcome and valued. One such policy is whether or not children are allowed in classrooms. For parenting students, clear guidelines on children being on campus could mean the difference between showing up for class and having to stay home and missing vital instruction.

The survey showed that most student parents, nearly 60%, did not know if there is a campus policy on whether they can bring their children to class, and only 3% indicated their campus had a policy that allowed them to bring their children to class.

When broken down by school type, nearly a third of parenting students at two-year colleges indicated that their institutions had a policy of no children ever being allowed in class, and nearly 70% of parenting students in graduate school indicated not knowing what the policy was for their institutions.

Without clarity on the policy, more than half of respondents did not feel comfortable bringing their children to class (54%). When broken down by school type, parenting students attending two-year colleges were least comfortable — 64%.

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	2-YEAR COMMUNITY OR JUNIOR COLLEGE	4-YEAR COLLEGE/ UNIVERSITY	GRADUATE SCHOOL
There is a policy; children are allowed in class at any time	3%	5%	2%	4%
There is a policy; children are allowed in class under certain circumstances	3%	3%	2%	4%
There is a policy; children are never allowed in class	17%	28%	15%	2%
There is no policy; it is left up to the individual professors	13%	13%	11%	18%
I am not sure whether there is a policy	59%	48%	63%	67%
Other	5%	3%	7%	5%

Lack of policies and/or poor communication on policies can translate into parenting students missing class altogether. We asked how many days respondents missed class in their last semester as a result of an interruption in their childcare arrangements. More than 60% of respondents missed between 1 and 5+ days of class last semester due to lack of child care. This is true across every race and ethnicity and for both male and female respondents, pointing to the importance of creating clear and well-communicated policies on whether children are allowed in class in the event of an emergency.

"
> I was counted absent and had it held against me when both myself and my child had the flu. They do not want us coming to school sick, but yet we're held accountable when things, such as the flu, touch our homes."

None	37%
1–2 days	37%
3–5 days	19%
5+ days	7%
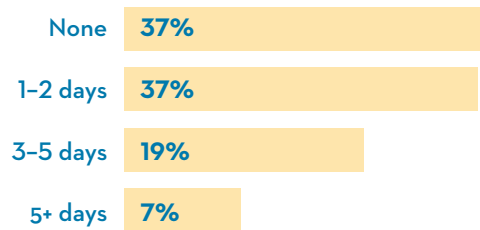
MORE THAN 60% MISSED BETWEEN **1** AND **5+** DAYS OF CLASS DUE TO LACK OF CHILD CARE
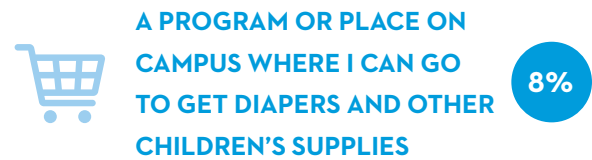
SURVEY FINDINGS

PHYSICAL SPACE ON CAMPUS

A campus' physical characteristics also play a vital role in making students with children and/or dependents feel like they belong and their needs are met — two essentials for college completion. The survey found that, overall, campuses lack family-friendly attributes (i.e. those that embrace parenting) that could have a significant impact on student parents.

> " Offering an environment on campus where I can change diapers and feed my daughter without people gawking at me would make me feel much more comfortable."

RESPONDENTS SAW THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS ON THEIR CAMPUSES

LACTATION ROOM	24%
PARENT OR EXPECTING-PARENT PARKING SPACES	3%
PLAYGROUND	9%
DIAPER-CHANGING STATIONS IN BATHROOMS	24%
FAMILY-FRIENDLY SPACES IN LIBRARIES OR LOUNGES	12%
FAMILY HOUSING	9%
PLAY AREAS IN WAITING ROOMS	2%

ON-CAMPUS CHILD CARE	29%
CHILD CARE OFFERED AT ON-CAMPUS EVENTS	8%
EVENTS SPECIFICALLY FOR PARENTING STUDENTS	16%
PHOTOS DISPLAYED OF STUDENTS WITH THEIR CHILDREN	7%
A PROGRAM OR PLACE ON CAMPUS WHERE I CAN GO TO GET DIAPERS AND OTHER CHILDREN'S SUPPLIES	8%
OTHER	8%

MORE THAN
1 IN 3
DID NOT SEE FAMILY-FRIENDLY CHARACTERISTICS ON CAMPUS

More than a third of respondents did not see any family-friendly characteristics on their campuses, reflecting the lack of physical spaces that exist on college campuses to accommodate parenting students. This number increased for African American or Black parenting students; nearly half (45%) indicated that they did not see any family-friendly characteristics on their campuses.

When looking at physical characteristics by institution type, nearly a third (29%) of community college parenting students and four-year parenting students indicated seeing no family-friendly characteristics on their campuses. This number was even higher for parenting students in graduate school, where 42% indicated seeing no family-friendly characteristics on their campuses. This all suggests that these family-friendly aspects are lacking across all types of institutions.

For those students who indicated that they had seen family-friendly physical aspects on their campuses, the most popular included lactation room, diaper-changing stations in bathrooms, and on-campus child care. It's important to note that these spaces are also available to faculty and staff and do not necessarily represent supports put in place specifically for parenting students or that parenting students have priority in using them (for example, in many cases, more faculty than students utilize on-campus child care).

Low hanging, no-cost characteristics that could communicate that parenting students are welcome were rare. For example, only 7% of respondents reported seeing photos of students with children in their school's marketing collateral or communications.

" Having a dedicated space for student parents to meet one another in a safe environment is critical for building community and a sense of belonging."

A'JA
GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

ALICIA
GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

The services that institutions put in place and the way those services are provided to students contribute to institutional culture and determine how successfully students are able to move through the environment. We asked respondents about their experiences using various services at their institution to understand the hurdles to degree attainment.

While respondents indicated that the admissions process and registering for classes were the easiest systems to navigate, they cited the following services as the most difficult:

1 Participating in extracurricular activities or group projects (60% found it difficult or very difficult)

2 Securing child care that meets my needs (42% found it difficult or very difficult)

3 Connecting to career opportunities (34% found it difficult or very difficult)

4 The financial aid process (27% found it difficult or very difficult)

5 Transportation (21% found it difficult or very difficult)

PARTICIPATING IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very difficult	34%	37%	26%	18%	38%	33%
Difficult	26%	19%	40%	18%	30%	33%
Neither difficult nor easy	20%	24%	17%	35%	11%	34%
Easy	13%	14%	15%	12%	13%	0%
Very easy	7%	6%	2%	17%	8%	0%

While 60% of all respondents indicated that participating in extracurricular activities was either difficult or very difficult, the numbers are higher for African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino students — 66% and 68%, respectively — and for female students — 67% versus 35% for males. Not being able to participate in these types of activities can contribute to students feeling disconnected from their campus community, and can prevent them from growing their networks for career and internship connections.

"If child care was provided at school events I would actually be able to attend them."

"
At the library and the gym I can drop off my kids for 3 hours while I study or work out or go to class. It is the only reason that I have been able to juggle school, work, and raising two children and maintaining a 3.88 GPA."

Securing Child Care

Campus child care has been steadily declining nationwide[xiii], which means parenting students have to rely more and more on family or friends, subsidized community programs, or high-cost private care. If campus child care is offered, parenting students often face long wait lists and high costs, leaving them with few options.

Respondents indicated that cost was the most influential factor in their choice of child care — 42%. The most popular form of child care was a family member or a friend (40%), most likely due to the reduced cost. Only 8% of respondents use campus-based child care — and that percentage drops in half for African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino respondents (4% for each) compared to 11% for White students.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY SECURING CHILD CARE

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very difficult	19%	17%	15%	29%	21%	44%
Difficult	23%	21%	36%	12%	21%	22%
Neither difficult nor easy	35%	40%	30%	29%	32%	34%
Easy	14%	12%	15%	18%	19%	0%
Very easy	9%	10%	4%	12%	7%	0%

Respondents indicated that securing child care was one of the most difficult challenges in navigating their post-secondary credential. African American or Black students indicated the most difficulty with securing child care — 51% — and this challenge was more acute for female parenting students than male parenting students (45% vs 29%).

"
I like the child care on campus a lot, but even with help paying for it, we could not afford it."

SURVEY FINDINGS

Career Services

Pursuing a postsecondary credential is often critical to earning family-sustaining wages, and colleges and universities want to partner with employers to provide qualified and diverse talent. However, we found that student parents find it difficult to connect to career opportunities that may be provided by their institutions.
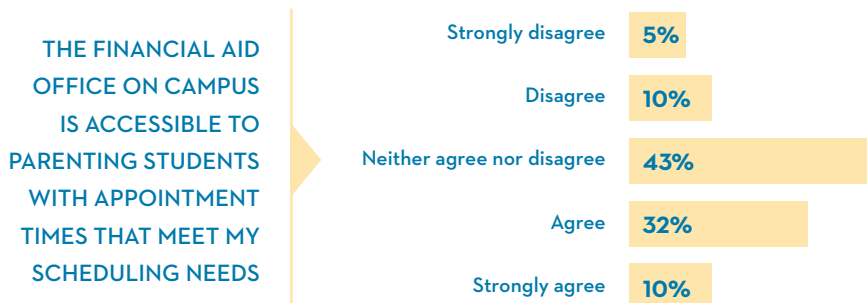
CONNECTING TO CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

|	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very difficult	13%	10%	13%	6%	21%	11%
Difficult	21%	17%	26%	24%	28%	0%
Neither difficult nor easy	42%	48%	40%	41%	33%	56%
Easy	17%	19%	17%	18%	9%	22%
Very easy	7%	6%	4%	11%	9%	11%

More than a third of respondents indicated that connecting to career opportunities was difficult or very difficult, and 39% did not feel that their college helps them identify and secure internship opportunities that are realistic for them as parents. These challenges are more significant for student parents of color and for female parenting students.

Financial Aid

Financial aid can influence which institutions parenting students attend, their enrollment status, and even what type of child care they are able to secure for their children. However, the system is complex and difficult to access. Our survey confirmed these hurdles.

THE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE ON CAMPUS IS ACCESSIBLE TO PARENTING STUDENTS WITH APPOINTMENT TIMES THAT MEET MY SCHEDULING NEEDS

Strongly disagree	**5%**
Disagree	**10%**
Neither agree nor disagree	**43%**
Agree	**32%**
Strongly agree	**10%**

Only 15% of all respondents felt that the financial aid office was not accessible, which could reflect the success of efforts by institutions to provide more flexible hours and other accommodations for low-income students. However, when disaggregating the data by race and ethnicity, African American or Black parenting students had the most difficulty navigating the financial aid process, with 38% finding it difficult or very difficult to navigate. This is important to note, as IWPR found that African American or Black student parents hold
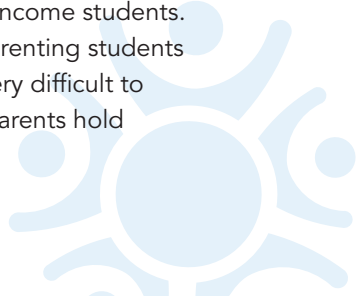
ARIEL
GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

more student debt than parents or non-parents of every other racial/ethnic background, borrowing an average of $18,100, compared with an average of $13,500 among all students, $13,100 among White student parents, and $10,400 among Hispanic student parents[xiv].

In 2019, the Government Accountability Office released a report on campus child care for student parents, including a finding that institutions were not informing their parenting students that they could qualify for additional aid for dependent care. The results of this survey reinforced this finding. Three-quarters of respondents were unaware that their financial aid could be increased to account for childcare costs.

When broken down by gender, nearly 20% of male respondents indicated that they were informed that childcare expenses could be taken into account in the determination of their financial aid award compared to only 10% of female respondents.

Of those students who were informed, more than half said that their financial aid office successfully adjusted their financial aid award based on the dependent care allowance. However, 25% still said that their awards were not successfully adjusted, and nearly 20% were not sure what the outcome was, which indicates a lack of communication and clarity around their financial aid award.

When broken down by school type, the percentage of students who had their aid award successfully adjusted for dependent care costs increases with the level of education. For example, 100% of parenting students in graduate school who were informed that they could qualify for additional aid for dependent care costs indicated that their award was successfully adjusted compared to just 33% attending a two-year college.

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	2-YEAR COMMUNITY OR JUNIOR COLLEGE	4-YEAR COLLEGE/ UNIVERSITY	GRADUATE SCHOOL
Yes	56%	33%	64%	100%
No	25%	33%	29%	0%
Not sure	19%	34%	7%	0%

Q DID YOUR SCHOOL'S FINANCIAL AID OFFICE OR ANYONE ELSE FROM YOUR COLLEGE INFORM YOU THAT CHILDCARE EXPENSES COULD BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN THE DETERMINATION OF YOUR FINANCIAL AID AWARD?

13%
12%
75%

● Yes ● No ● Not sure
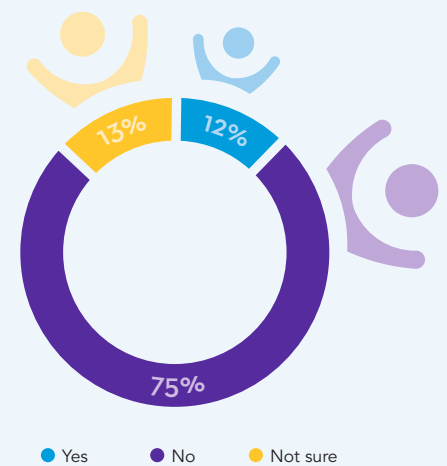
75%

WERE UNAWARE THEIR FINANCIAL AID COULD BE INCREASED TO ACCOUNT FOR CHILDCARE COSTS

THAT NUMBER INCREASES TO

79%

FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK PARENTING STUDENTS

JOSEPH
GENERATION HOPE
SCHOLAR

20%

MORE THAN 20% OF RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT TRANSPORTATION TO AND FROM CAMPUS WAS EITHER DIFFICULT OR VERY DIFFICULT. THIS WAS THE CASE FOR 25% OF AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK RESPONDENTS AND 24% OF HISPANIC OR LATINO STUDENTS.

Transportation

The vast majority of student parents are commuter students, which means that transportation costs — whether securing and maintaining a car or taking public transit — can significantly hinder their ability to earn a degree. The College Board found that transportation costs in the 2019–20 academic year accounted for 17% of an average post-secondary commuter student's living expenses[xv]. In addition to getting to and from campus, parenting students are also commuting to work and to their children's school or childcare location each day.

TRANSPORTATION (GETTING TO/FROM CLASS)

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very difficult	6%	5%	2%	0%	9%	22%
Difficult	15%	12%	23%	6%	15%	11%
Neither difficult nor easy	28%	27%	30%	30%	29%	44%
Easy	33%	35%	36%	35%	30%	23%
Very easy	18%	21%	9%	29%	17%	0%

Mental Health

While mental health was not among the top five services that respondents found it difficult to navigate, we included this information as mental health can pose challenges for all college students, especially those who have the added responsibility of parenting.

		TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
I FEEL COMFORTABLE ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ON MY CAMPUS FOR MYSELF AND MY CHILD, WITH APPOINTMENT TIMES THAT MEET MY SCHEDULING NEEDS	Strongly disagree	12%	12%	23%	0%	13%	0%
	Disagree	20%	17%	21%	12%	29%	33%
	Neither agree nor disagree	41%	44%	36%	53%	32%	56%
	Agree	17%	17%	15%	24%	17%	11%
	Strongly agree	10%	10%	5%	11%	9%	0%

Fewer than a third of respondents are comfortable accessing mental health services on campus for themselves and their child and feel appointment times meet their scheduling needs. The highest levels of discomfort are among African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino students, indicating institutions could do more to provide mental health support to these groups. More female parenting students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they feel comfortable accessing mental health services on their campus compared to male parenting students — 36% compared to 17%.

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IMPACT ON PARENTING STUDENTS

FEELING WELCOME AND CONNECTED

When students don't see policies, physical characteristics, and an institutional culture that is designed with their needs in mind, they can feel like outsiders. Overall, 20% of respondents indicated they felt either somewhat unwelcome or very unwelcome on their campuses. Broken down by school type, parenting students at community colleges are most likely to feel very welcome — 48% compared to 32% of four-year students and 24% of graduate students. Broken down by race and ethnicity, 30% of parenting African American or Black students and 25% of parenting Hispanic or Latino students feel either somewhat unwelcome or very unwelcome compared to 16% of parenting White students. Female parenting students also tended to feel more unwelcome on their campuses compared to male parenting students — 24% versus 9%.

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very welcome	34%	37%	32%	35%	32%	11%
Somewhat welcome	27%	28%	19%	29%	28%	22%
Neither welcome nor unwelcome	19%	19%	19%	24%	15%	44%
Somewhat unwelcome	15%	13%	21%	0%	17%	23%
Very unwelcome	5%	3%	9%	12%	8%	0%

Overall, nearly half of respondents said they felt somewhat disconnected or very disconnected from their college community, and 40% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they felt isolated as a parenting student on their campus. This disconnect was higher for female students than male students — 49% versus 28%, respectively.

20%
FELT UNWELCOME ON CAMPUS

40%
FELT ISOLATED AS A PARENTING STUDENT ON CAMPUS

"Some people accept you while others judge you and keep their distance."

COMFORT DISCLOSING PARENTING STATUS

According to the survey, most students were very comfortable or somewhat comfortable disclosing parenting status to their professors (71%). However, 21% were somewhat uncomfortable or very uncomfortable doing so, and those percentages were higher for African American or Black and Hispanic or Latino students — 28% and 29%, respectively. Comfort level has implications for the ability of institutions to collect and track parenting status of students via intake forms that require self-disclosure. While the majority of students are comfortable self-disclosing, students of color may have more apprehension.

	TOTAL STUDENT PARENTS	CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	ASIAN, AI/AN, PI	HISPANIC OR LATINO	OTHER
Very comfortable	47%	54%	47%	59%	36%	11%
Somewhat comfortable	24%	22%	21%	17%	32%	22%
Neither comfortable or uncomfortable	8%	10%	4%	12%	3%	33%
Somewhat uncomfortable	14%	10%	19%	6%	21%	11%
Very uncomfortable	7%	4%	9%	6%	8%	23%

CONNECTING WITH OTHER PARENTING STUDENTS

While connecting with peers, particularly peers with similar experiences and backgrounds, is important, our survey found that 38% of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that they were connected to other parenting students on their campuses. This suggests that institutions can do more to bring parenting students together for peer support.
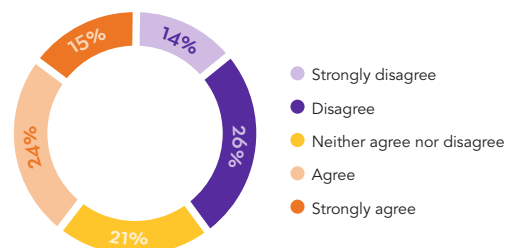
I AM CONNECTED TO OTHER PARENTING STUDENTS ON MY CAMPUS

10% | 18% | 20% | 30% | 22%

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
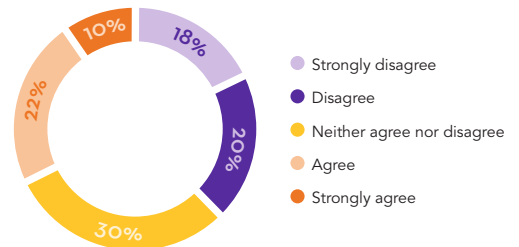
THE ROLE OF TITLE IX

Institutions may be relying on their Title IX representative or efforts to cover their support of parenting students, but only 49% of respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed that they knew who to talk to if they believed they were being discriminated against due to their parenting status. When looking at gender, only 36% of female respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew who to talk to if they believed they were being discriminated against due to their parenting status.

I KNOW WHO I SHOULD TALK TO IF I BELIEVE I AM BEING DISCRIMINATED AGAINST DUE TO MY PARENTING STATUS

15% | 14% | 26% | 21% | 24%

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While higher ed has made improvements in completion efforts, the experience of student parents is largely uncharted territory. These survey findings confirm much of what Generation Hope sees every day in our work with teen parents in college: parenting students are unnecessarily on the fringes causing real hurdles to their degree attainment. Parenting students intersect with various groups that are frequently discussed, such as low-income students, students of color, and first-generation students — but collectively this population still falls under the radar. Knowing that nearly one in five undergraduate students nationwide is parenting, systemic solutions to remove barriers to their success are vital.

The following recommendations stem from Generation Hope's analysis of the survey and from our September 2019 roundtable discussion, which included insights and contributions from student parents, higher education administrators, advocates, researchers, and philanthropists. Because student parents are more likely to be students of color, the following recommendations should be viewed and implemented through a racial-equity lens.

HIGHER ED RECOMMENDATIONS

1 **Collect and track the parenting status of your students.** Colleges should put mechanisms in place to track the number of enrolled parenting students on an ongoing basis. In order to address the needs of student parents, administrators must know these numbers and understand their experiences.

2 **Apply a parenting-student lens to your institution's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.** Because the needs of parenting students are intertwined with the needs of various other groups and are higher for students of color who are parenting, they should be prioritized in your institution's racial-equity work.

3 **Designate a staff position to champion the needs of parenting students across your institution.** Identifying and addressing the needs of your parenting students will require the dedicated energy of a member of your staff. This person should also convene a working group of faculty, staff, and students to identify key metrics for following and enhancing the student-parent experience. The findings in this survey have implications for all university services, from facilities to financial aid to transportation. The needs of this population cannot and should not be addressed in a silo, and solutions should always involve the voices of student parents.

KAREN
GENERATION HOPE SCHOLAR

4 **Prioritize the creation of family-friendly policies and make sure they are clearly communicated to students.** Most parenting students are unaware of policies on whether they can bring their children to class, indicating that explicit policies are needed and should be over communicated. Respondents indicated that email was their top choice of communication. Student parents should be involved in the creation of these policies.
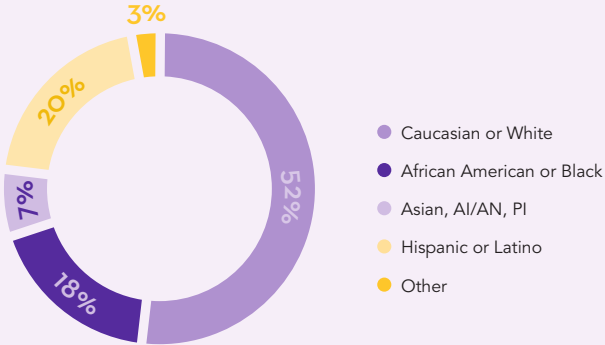
COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTING STUDENTS

Text	**36%**
Email	**89%**
Social media	**22%**
Listservs	**7%**
Other	**4%**
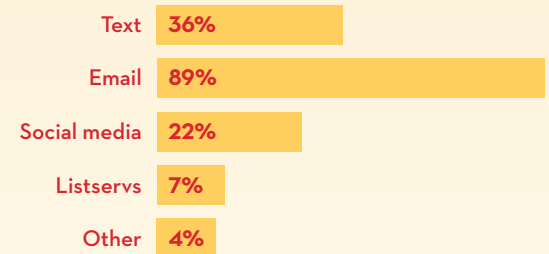
5 **Identify ways to be more inclusive of parenting students in campus life.** While student parents are limited in their time, they want to feel connected to their college communities just as their non-parenting peers do. Participating in extracurricular activities is one of the most difficult things to navigate for parenting students, and yet better engagement lends itself to increased likelihood of completion.

6 **Incorporate the needs of student parents in your government relations work.** Affordable child care is an example of an advocacy opportunity for your institution that would remove a significant barrier to completion for parenting students. Another example is ensuring that states let students meet their TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) work requirement by attending college. College students overall need more access to public benefits, and this is especially true for parenting college students.
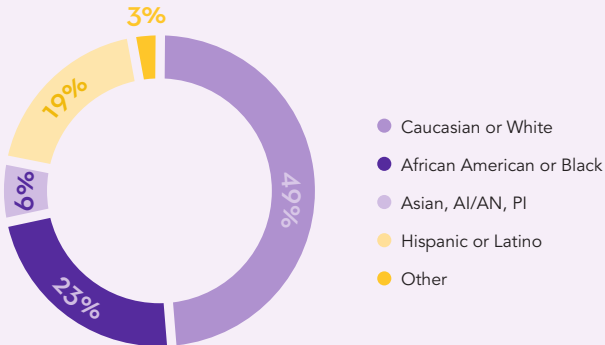
METHODOLOGY

In March and April 2020, Generation Hope shared a survey with its student-parent cohort, on social media, and via its partners resulting in 259 student-parent responses attending 147+ institutions. While these findings shed light on the college experiences of parenting students, they should not be taken as a completely representative sample of the broader population, etc. Because the data are not representative, the distribution of parents by race and ethnicity does not perfectly align with what we know about the student-parent population nationally. The table below provides an accurate breakdown of the race/ethnicity of student parents nationally compared to the survey respondents.

OUR DATA

- Caucasian or White
- African American or Black
- Asian, AI/AN, PI
- Hispanic or Latino
- Other

52% | 18% | 7% | 20% | 3%

Compared to source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2015–16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16).

NATIONAL DATA

- Caucasian or White
- African American or Black
- Asian, AI/AN, PI
- Hispanic or Latino
- Other

49% | 23% | 6% | 19% | 3%

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABOUT GENERATION HOPE

Founded in 2010, Generation Hope is a nonprofit organization in Washington, DC, that surrounds motivated teen parents and their children with the mentors, emotional support, and financial resources that they need to thrive in college and kindergarten, thereby driving a two-generation solution to poverty. Fewer than 2% of teen mothers will earn their college degrees before they are 30 years old, but Generation Hope Scholars graduate at a rate that exceeds the national average for all college students, is almost two times the rate of low-income college students, and is almost eight times the rate of single mothers nationwide. Generation Hope engages in local and national advocacy work, amplifying the student-parent voice and centering their experiences. Additionally, Generation Hope leverages its data and best practices to serve as a thought partner, providing colleges with the tools, resources, and support that they need to implement programs, adjust policies, and change structures and culture to improve outcomes for student parents.

For questions about the survey or requests for partnership on implementing best practices for student-parent success, please contact:

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