

GENERATION HOPE POLICY PRIORITIES

Powerbuilding, Uplifting Voices, and
Removing Barriers with Student Parents

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About Generation Hope

Founded in 2010, Generation Hope is a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. To ensure all student parents have the opportunities to succeed and experience economic mobility, Generation Hope engages education and policy partners to drive systemic change and provides direct support to teen parents in college (Scholars) as well as their children through holistic, two-generation programming. 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 provide 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 through our capacity building program called FamilyU.





OUR MISSION: To ensure all student parents have the opportunities to succeed and experience economic mobility, Generation Hope engages education and policy partners to drive systemic change and provides direct support to teen parents in college as well as their children through holistic, two-generation programming.

OUR ROLE IN SYSTEMIC CHANGE: As an **advocate and activist**, Generation Hope will elevate the experiences of teen/student parents at the intersection of race and education to pursue national and local policy change. We believe in the power of teen/student parents – including teen/student parents of color – and know that they are the best advocates for themselves and those similarly positioned. To that end, Generation Hope will deploy, support, and utilize teen/student parents as subject matter experts as we seek to eliminate, modify, and create public policies to best support them.

OUR STUDENT PARENT DEFINITION: We define **student parent** as a student who is a parent or assumes caregiving responsibilities of any biological, adopted, step, or foster child(ren) living in their household part or full time. We also include pregnant and expecting students in the 'student parent' group.



ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF PARENTING COLLEGE STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Generation Hope builds upon our direct work with student parents to drive policies that accelerate the economic and social mobility of parenting college students and their families nationwide.

Generation Hope champions policies that remove systemic barriers for parenting college students while helping to build a movement that enshrines what works in student parent support and creates a new and better climate for this population. As an advocate in this space, we illuminate the challenges facing student parents, centering and power-building with them and other stakeholders to influence policies, practices, and tool development. We engage in advocacy that recognizes the tremendous assets and strengths of parenting college students as well as the intersectionality of their experiences including race, ethnicity, immigration status, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and more.

Nearly 5 million college students, or 25% of all undergraduates, are parenting or have other caregiving responsibilities, yet their unique challenges are often overlooked and under-supported by the higher education system and policymakers. They are mostly women with low incomes and spend, on average, 9 hours or more per day on housework and childcare duties¹, leaving little time for sleep, work, and school. The average student parent has 50% less time to complete their coursework due to caregiving responsibilities². The majority of student parents also belong to a racial and/or ethnic minority group, making discrimination in higher education and other systems an additional barrier to retention and graduation. Although student parents have higher GPAs on average than their non-parenting peers, the institutions they attend lack many of the physical characteristics and cultural norms that would support their enrollment, retention, and completion including, but not limited to: on-campus childcare, family-friendly policies, lactation rooms, diaper-changing stations in bathrooms, family housing, student parent events, and more³. This lack of support leads to a 6-year graduation rate of only 8% for single mother college students⁴ and 33% for all other student parents⁵. Upon graduation, student parents are much less reliant on social services, but the road to economic prosperity is saddled with above average loan debt, exorbitant childcare costs, and discrimination in the workplace for graduates of color. **Our higher education system, social services, and workforce are overdue for a redesign that supports the needs of student parents and their families to drive access, completion, and economic mobility.**

Generation Hope is eager to make progress within a regional and federal movement that centers the voices and needs of student parents in the development of a new environment for the millions of parenting college students across the nation. This change requires a bipartisan effort and collaboration across various sectors to mobilize policymakers to protect and invest in this unique and untapped population of students. Student parent work is racial justice work, and our commitment to student parent success is a commitment to challenging the social, cultural, and economic inequalities imposed on student parents by outdated systems. **Generation Hope will drive systemic change to address historical racism and remove barriers for teen/student parents and their families by implementing a federal and local policy and advocacy agenda, transforming the higher education landscape through institutional capacity building and providing resources and tools for the broader higher education and workforce community.**





Student Parents and Young Parents

Generation Hope has seen the unique challenges faced by young parents through our direct work with them and their families. While the broader student parent population includes students of all ages, at times young parents' challenges are more acute than older parents. For example, parenting students ages 18–24 struggle more with their mental health, substance use, and feelings of low self-esteem and isolation when compared to older student parents. They also tend to struggle more with basic needs, including being more concerned about running out of food than older student parents⁶. When it comes to college completion, fewer than 2%⁷ of teen mothers earn a degree before age 30. Generation Hope's policy agenda is focused on the needs of the larger student parent population, but we will also champion policies that provide real solutions for this important subgroup.

Good Research. Best Practices. Students as Experts.

Our policy priorities are undergirded by the voices of student parents. In addition to drawing upon our 10+ years of direct work with young parents in college in the D.C. metropolitan region, we held a series of focus groups to identify persistent challenges faced by our Scholars and student parents attending institutions across the country. Their expertise, coupled with Generation Hope's own research and the research of partner organizations, ensures a comprehensive view of the systemic barriers to student parent success and enables us to advocate for authentic policy solutions to tackle those challenges.

In the next sections, we present Generation Hope's overarching student parent policy priorities. Generation Hope will work to advance these priorities at the federal level as well as regionally in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, which includes Northern Virginia, parts of Maryland, and the entire District of Columbia. Rather than parse out race equity as a single priority within our agenda, Generation Hope has woven the imperative to address racial disparities as a thread throughout each priority, and we will seek out legislative solutions that are intended to undo racist policies that have oppressed various communities.

GENERATION HOPE'S POLICY PRIORITIES



HIGHER EDUCATION

Generation Hope will focus on

- ✓ reducing the financial hurdles to earning a postsecondary credential;
- ✓ creating educational opportunities by establishing more family-friendly campuses; and
- ✓ increasing awareness of the experiences of parenting college students.



QUALITY CHILDCARE

Generation Hope will focus on

- ✓ increasing affordability of childcare that meets families' needs; and
- ✓ reducing barriers to accessing childcare supports.



ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Generation Hope will focus on

- ✓ connecting college coursework to public benefits programs;
- ✓ removing barriers to postsecondary completion for fathers to advance in the workforce; and
- ✓ expanding career pathways and access to family-sustaining wages.



HIGHER EDUCATION

Not having a postsecondary credential can be devastating for parents who are often already finding it difficult to provide for their families and can have lasting limitations on their opportunities and their children's opportunities. Generation Hope's approach to ensuring that higher education is both accessible and affordable for student parents includes

- ✓ advocating for policies that reduce the financial hurdles to higher education for this population,
- ✓ increasing the capacity of institutions to create more family-friendly campuses,
- ✓ and raising awareness about student parents' rights, experiences, tremendous assets, and their intersectionality with various other student groups.

REDUCING THE FINANCIAL HURDLES TO EARNING A POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL

→ **62%** of single student parents have no financial resources to devote to their educational expenses.⁸

Many parents view degree attainment as a pathway to economic independence and prosperity for themselves and their families, but because of the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 and the rising costs of higher education, college is more out of reach than ever before. While initial college costs are a challenge, handling the ongoing expenses associated with staying in college is often more difficult than enrolling. Many student parents have to adjust their attendance, work hours, childcare, and class selection because of financial aid gaps and rapidly accruing loan debt. 43%⁹ of student parents are single mothers, meaning that a large portion of the student parent population are likely juggling these costs with only one income. Housing and food are constant, pressing needs for this population, often causing student parents to stop out before they earn a postsecondary credential. Even before COVID-19, 53% of parenting students were food insecure in the prior 30 days, 68% were housing insecure in the previous year, and 17% were homeless in the previous year¹⁰. We know that the pandemic has exacerbated these crises for parenting college students, and the impact is more severe for students of color.

Generation Hope will champion policies that address the financial barriers to enrolling in and completing college for student parents, taking into consideration the systemic racism that has often fortified these roadblocks.



FROM THE EXPERTS

I almost gave up going to school because I couldn't afford it on my own, even after some financial help."


– Syeedah, Generation Hope Scholar Alumna, Bowie State University

CREATING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES BY ESTABLISHING MORE FAMILY-FRIENDLY CAMPUSES

→ **Nearly half** of student parents feel somewhat disconnected or very disconnected from their college community.¹¹

While financial barriers create significant hurdles to earning a postsecondary credential for parenting college students, campus environments that do not fully support or embrace this population can be equally damaging. Despite having higher GPAs on average than their non-parenting peers, student parents are 10 times less likely¹² to complete a bachelor's degree within five years than students without children in part because their experiences, needs, and assets continue to go unrecognized and are not prioritized within higher education. This lack of support can range from institutions not having family-friendly study areas to faculty and staff treating parents more harshly because of their caregiving responsibilities. In order to foster more supportive environments for student parents, institutions will require additional resources, and this is an acute need for historically underfunded institutions such as community colleges,





Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), tribal colleges, and minority-serving institutions (MSIs). For example, the largest share of student parents attend community colleges, and yet community colleges receive \$8,800 less¹³ in education revenue per student enrolled than four-year institutions.

Generation Hope will advocate for increased resources that will allow institutions to bolster their capacity to serve parenting college students, particularly for historically underfunded schools.



FROM THE EXPERTS

One of the biggest barriers for me was not understanding the [college admissions] process at all — just not being informed and educated about the process. Being a first-generation American, you don't really know. Your parents never teach you, and being the oldest in the family, you don't have an older brother, sibling, or relative that can help you at all."

– Ariel, Generation Hope Scholar, George Mason University

INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTING COLLEGE STUDENTS

→ Parents with young children are **twice as likely** to drop out of college as students with no children due to various systemic barriers.¹⁴

Student parents are resilient and determined while facing unique challenges and experiences that are frequently not recognized by those working in higher education and policy. Often referred to as an invisible population, student parents are typically overlooked in conversations focused on college access and completion, and despite their overlapping identity with various other marginalized groups, they are not prioritized in conversations about equity and higher education. The recent student parent movement has shed light on some of the academic hurdles specific to student parents. For example, research on the impact of "time poverty"¹⁵ on student parents, which refers to the limited time available for them to study and complete coursework due to caregiving and other responsibilities, is only a drop in the bucket for widespread recognition and policy change that benefits this student group. The result is that too many student parents are not receiving the opportunities and support that they need to realize their dreams.

Generation Hope will lead and support initiatives that shed light on the experiences and the potential of student parents to increase their chances of earning a postsecondary credential, a critical factor in overcoming racial disparities and achieving their goals.



FROM THE EXPERTS

I will say that if I did not have my kids, I actually probably wouldn't have gone to school because I wouldn't have access to a program like Generation Hope. Just because I didn't have any social networking and because of my track record in high school, [my counselors] didn't think I was a person worth informing about resources...They kind of looked at me like I was a lost cause."

– Yoslin, Generation Hope Scholar Alumna, University of Maryland, College Park





QUALITY CHILDCARE

INCREASING AFFORDABILITY OF CHILDCARE THAT MEETS FAMILIES' NEEDS

→ On average¹⁶, **half of student parents** spend nearly \$490 per month on childcare.

The pandemic has laid bare the fragility of our nation's childcare system as parents have grappled to piece together care amidst the many financial and logistical impacts of COVID-19. However, for student parents, this crisis is not new. They have always struggled to balance college and work with childcare costs that exceed¹⁷ the average fees and tuition of a four-year public university in 31 states and the District of Columbia. More funding for campus-based childcare, such as the federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, as well as universal Pre-K and subsidized childcare could provide vital relief for this student group and make a postsecondary credential more attainable.

Generation Hope will support initiatives that make high-quality, affordable childcare a reality for more families.



FROM THE EXPERTS

It was a struggle finding childcare. My mom's a stay-at-home mom, so at times she was able to watch my daughter so I could go to school, and I had a part-time job. Sometimes that was just unreliable. There were times when she wasn't home, and I had school, and I found myself panicking because I might not make it to school or to work because I had to rely on my mom. I didn't have too much money to pay for childcare."

– Anel, Student Parent Focus Group Participant



REDUCING BARRIERS TO ACCESSING CHILDCARE SUPPORTS

→ As of 2019, the federal program that provides funds to colleges and universities to create campus childcare solutions called Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) served **less than 1%** of student parents nationwide¹⁸.

In addition to dealing with the increasing cost of childcare, student parents also face daily logistical hurdles of getting their children to childcare and commuting to campus and work. On-campus childcare centers could reduce these challenges, but the proportion of community colleges and four-year institutions with childcare on campus has steadily declined over the years¹⁹. Those institutions that do have childcare facilities do not always offer affordable rates, can have long waiting lists, and may have hours that do not accommodate student parents' childcare needs. When students try to access childcare off campus, they can encounter restrictive policies, such as requiring that they have filed for child support before they can obtain childcare vouchers. For parents who are estranged from their former partner or who have dealt with domestic violence, this can create a significant barrier to accessing the childcare that they need.

Generation Hope will fight to improve access to high-quality childcare for families so student parents are able to pursue a postsecondary credential.



FROM THE EXPERTS

I go to a majority-girls school, and being a teen parent, you kind of expect a daycare center at least. It's honestly hard finding the right [place] because you don't want to send your kids to any type of daycare...you want to make sure your kid is safe."

– Student Parent Focus Group Participant





ECONOMIC MOBILITY

CONNECTING COLLEGE COURSEWORK TO PUBLIC BENEFITS PROGRAMS

→ Only **7.6%** of adult Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients have any postsecondary education.²⁰

Often individuals with low income are forced to pursue employment that does not adequately provide for their families at the expense of pursuing a postsecondary credential. This opportunity cost is reinforced by the “cliff effect²¹” created from government assistance programs that often require parents to choose between attending college and accessing public benefits — even though postsecondary degree attainment remains one of the most secure pathways to economic self-sufficiency. The state-administered Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, for example, provides basic needs to over a million families²² with children annually. However, TANF and other cash-assistance and childcare subsidy programs are subject to state discretion in how they are designed, accessed, and administered. TANF programs are supposed to promote work, responsibility, and self-sufficiency, and strengthen families, but some states impose restrictions that make it nearly impossible for individuals to go to college and access the assistance they need for their families.

The state of Washington requires²³ TANF recipients to take part in a WorkFirst activity for up to 30 hours a week if they want to continue receiving TANF and attend college. This workload can be crippling for many parents. These types of requirements can disincentivize going to school and can keep parents trapped in low-wage jobs that work against the goals of public benefit programs.

Generation Hope will advocate for valuing higher education as an accelerator for self-sufficiency in the administration of public benefit programs.



FROM THE EXPERTS

At the time, I didn’t have a job. So for those first two years [of college], I wasn’t able to get any state assistance.”

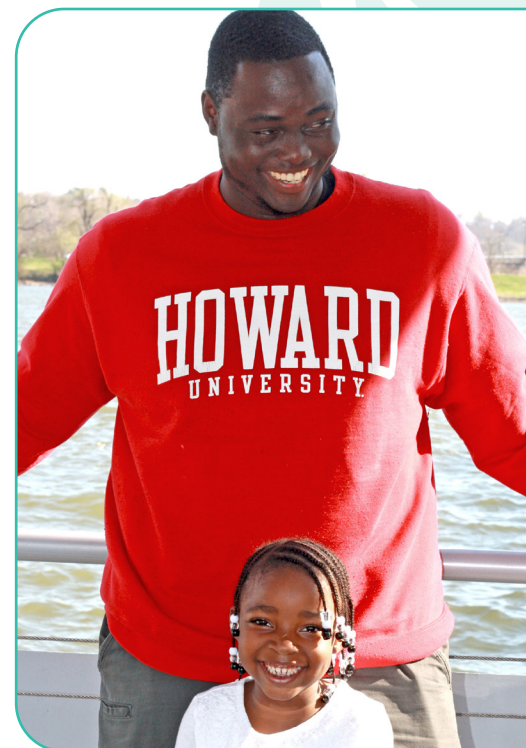
– Syeedah, Generation Hope Scholar Alumna, Bowie State University

REMOVING BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION FOR FATHERS TO ADVANCE IN THE WORKFORCE

→ **71%** of single fathers stop out of four-year institutions.²⁴

Single fathers are the most likely of any student parent group to stop out²⁵ of college. There are significant hurdles for fathers to enroll in and complete college that are associated with not only their parenting but also their socioeconomic status and their race and ethnicity. For example, Black males — whether they are parenting or not — who are working toward their bachelor’s degrees are more likely²⁶ than any other demographic group, including Black females, to drop out after their freshman year. Lack of role models who have pursued postsecondary education, the racial wealth gap, mass incarceration, limited educational opportunities, and many other factors contribute to this. Layering on the additional responsibilities of being a father can make college completion feel impossible. Unsurprisingly, stop out rates for Black and Latino fathers are higher than for single fathers overall. Without reforms that specifically support the educational pursuits of fathers and consider the role of race in their academic journeys, millions of students will continue to fall through the crack and not realize their full potential.

Generation Hope will support policies that remove hurdles to degree attainment for fathers, including efforts to create more educational opportunities for returning citizens.





EXPANDING CAREER PATHWAYS AND ACCESS TO FAMILY-SUSTAINING WAGES

→ **More than a third**²⁷ (36%) of working student parents do not have access to paid sick days, and many are employed in essential industries that require in-person work at set hours.



FROM THE EXPERTS

I used to struggle with substance abuse and incarceration. If I didn't have a kid, I think I still would've gone to school because I was just tired of doing the work that I've been doing — trades work. I just wanted something different. I'm privileged in many ways that I have a son and custody. I got out of prison this last time. I was working for several months, I got my son back, and I enrolled in school with the help of a program."

– Mike, Student Parent Focus Group Participant

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on America's workforce, but the impacts have been felt most deeply by people who are front-line workers, living in poverty, and earning low wages. Women of color have been specifically hard hit by the pandemic, and young, single mothers — more than half of whom are Black and Latina — experienced the sharpest decline²⁸ in employment in the initial months of the pandemic compared to other parents. These groups were devalued and undersupported long before the pandemic, evidenced by the fact that they have carried the burden of COVID-19 and its many impacts. Because so many student parents overlap with these groups (often work in low-wage, front-line jobs, experience poverty, come from racialized communities, are mothers, including young mothers, etc.) their career prospects and opportunities to earn family-sustaining wages are extremely limited. Career pathways that provide student parents with intentional, connected education programs and support services to help them advance to better jobs and higher levels of education not only benefit students but also help meet workforce demands in priority industries. Other intentional career supports, such as paid internships that accommodate the needs of parenting students, are key to creating economic mobility for this student population.

Generation Hope will champion policies that create true career advancement opportunities with family-sustaining wages for student parents.



FROM THE EXPERTS

It was kind of hard for me to get a job and do school because no one wanted anyone who was having a baby to be working at their facility. It was kind of hard for me financially as well as mentally."

– Aerielle, Student Parent Focus Group Participant





“

There’s a lot of things that go into the responsibility of being a parent. I’m not only an example for them on being able to overcome challenges, but I also have to provide a life for them that gives them a good experience as kids.”

– Waukecha, Student Parent Focus Group Participant

LOOKING AHEAD

Generation Hope is eager to advance these priorities by centering the voices of student parents and working alongside them to advocate for change. While COVID-19 has been devastating to many, including parenting students and their families, it has also focused attention on those who have been allowed to fall through the cracks for far too long and created an opportunity to reimagine our systems and challenge our norms. In order for our country to come out of the pandemic even stronger, the tremendous potential and the real challenges of student parents must be recognized in our efforts to “build back better.” Only then will we begin to see the gains that we are all hoping to see.

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To learn more about Generation Hope's advocacy efforts or to get involved, please contact us at info@generationhope.org or visit www.generationhope.org



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Generation Hope Policy Priorities published 2021