Supporting Student Parents Pays Off

Promoting college success for parents makes sense for families, taxpayers, and colleges.

Over 3 million undergraduates and 1 million graduate students have dependent children.

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Their average GPA is similar to nonparenting students
—3.17 vs. 3.15—
but only 17% complete a degree in 6 years
compared to 50% of nonparenting students.

Support Pays Off for Families

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After reenrolling and completing a college degree, mothers earn over $9,000 more annually.

Their children are 38% more likely to complete a college degree and earn over $5,500 more annually before age 30.

Support Pays Off for Taxpayers

A Virginia study shows that taxpayers can gain $1.86 billion in tax revenue and public benefit savings in 11 years by offering a comprehensive student-parent support program on public campuses, a return of over $5 per $1 invested.

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Providing on-campus child care can boost student-parents' graduation rates substantially and pays for itself.

Other states are likely to see a similar return on investment.

SPARK Collaborative

Sources: SPARK data insights from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2020; the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 2012/17; Theresa Anderson, "What If Mom Went Back to School?" (Urban Institute, 2022; dollar values are updated from the original brief to 2025 US dollars); Garrett Hicks and Theresa Anderson, "The Taxpayer Benefits of Supporting Student Parents: An Analysis of Three Policy Options for Virginia's Public Colleges" (Urban Institute, 2024).

THERESA ANDERSON (URBAN INSTITUTE)
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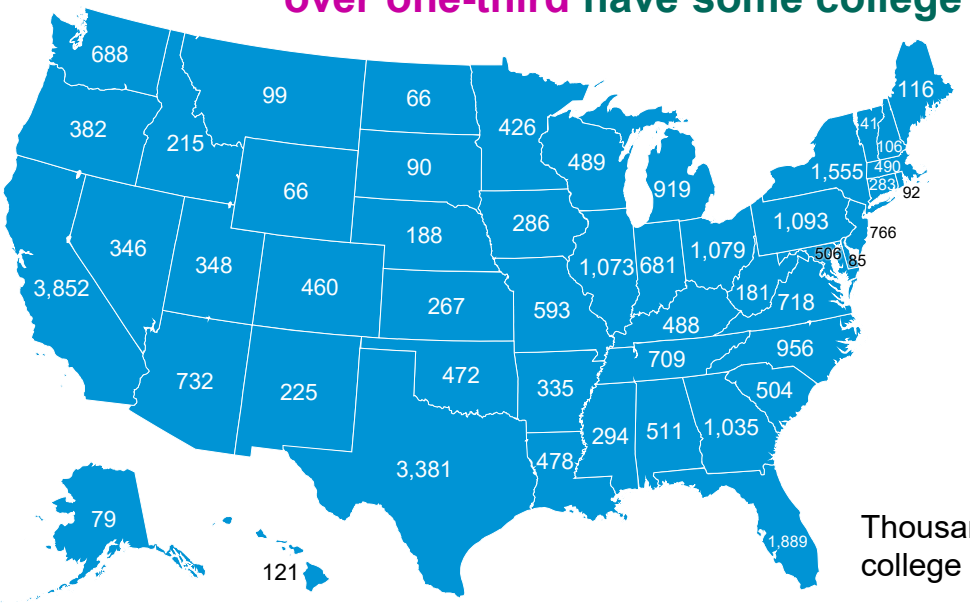
Support Pays Off for Colleges

Nearly 31 million parents are without a college degree—over one-third have some college experience.



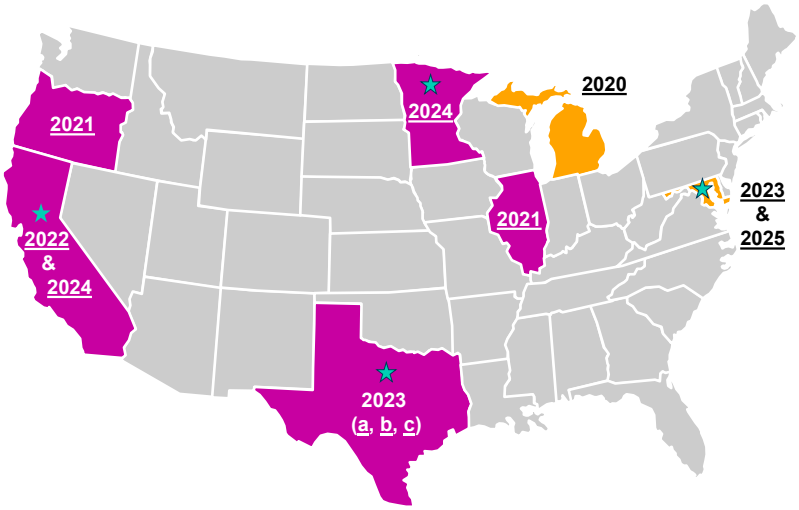
Parents are an important college recruitment population, and they represent an opportunity to upskill state workforces.

Thousands of parents without a college degree, by state

State Policies Are Expanding

Knowing who student parents are is an important first step.

Five states require colleges to track students' parenting status, as of fall 2025, and many have attached other required supports.



- Collects student-parent data
- Collected student-parent data at least once but does not currently
- ★ Legislated other supports

Click dates on map to access policy documentation

LEARN MORE

Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative at StudentParentAction.org

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Note: The top map was developed with Bing. © GeoNames, Microsoft, TomTom.
Source: Steven Ruggles, Sarah Flood, Matthew Sobek, Daniel Backman, Grace Cooper, Julia A. Rivera Drew, Stephanie Richards, Renae Rogers, Jonathan Schroeder, and Kari C. W. Williams. IPUMS USA: Version 16.0 American Community Survey, 2023. Minneapolis, MN: IPUMS, 2025. Tabulations checked by Renee Ryberg.

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