

# 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 \$9,500 more annually.**

**Their children are 38% more likely to complete a college degree and earn over \$5,800 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.**



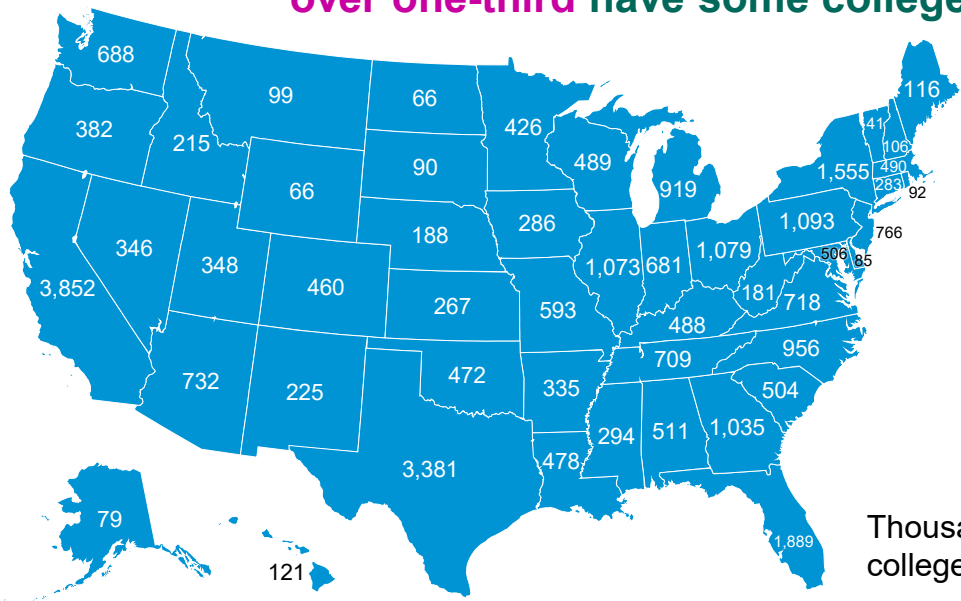
Sources: [SPARK data insights](#) from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2020; the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study 2012/17; Theresa Anderson, "[What If Mom Went Back to School?](#)" (Urban Institute, 2022; dollar values are updated from the original brief to 2026 US dollars); 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).

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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.



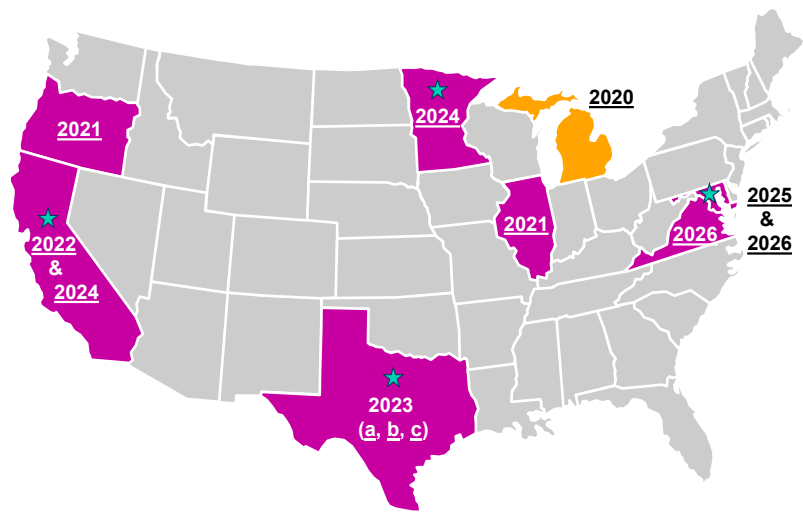
Parents are an important **college recruitment population**, and they represent an opportunity to **upskill state workforces**.

Thousands of parents without a college degree, by state

# State Policies Are Expanding

Knowing who student parents are is an important first step.

**Seven states** require colleges to **track students' parenting status**, as of **September 2026**, 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

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Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK)  
Collaborative at [StudentParentAction.org](https://StudentParentAction.org)



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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