

# Making Student Parents Visible in Virginia

Why Tracking Parenting Status in Higher Education Is a Smart, Common-Sense Policy



## THE PROBLEM:

Student parents are a significant but invisible population in Virginia's colleges.



More than **one in five college students nationwide** are parents, but most higher education systems were never designed with their needs in mind



In Virginia, institutions **lack consistent, reliable ways to identify which students are parents.** This makes it difficult to:

- Connect them to existing supports, like childcare, basic needs assistance, emergency aid, or flexible scheduling
- Track outcomes and measure what works
- Target resources efficiently and responsibly



Recent **FAFSA changes** have further limited institutions' ability to **identify student parents**, closing off one of the few indirect data sources colleges previously relied on.

## WHY THIS MATTERS FOR VIRGINIA:

Helping student parents succeed is a long-term workforce and economic strategy.



When student parents earn credentials, **their earnings increase, their reliance on public assistance declines, and their children benefit academically and economically.**



**"Every dollar invested in a comprehensive student parent support program in Virginia would yield an estimated \$5.36 in tax revenue and public-benefit savings, resulting in an estimated \$1.9 billion in public benefit net of costs by 2035."**

## THE SOLUTION: Require institutions to track student parenting status. **Simple. Low-Cost. High Impact.**

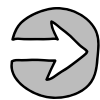
Collecting and reporting student parenting status from Virginia's higher education institutions would give the Commonwealth the basic information it needs to support student success. Good policy should:

- **Not mandate** services, spending, or new programs
- Build on **existing data systems and governance structures**
- Allow state agencies, in partnership with institutions, to determine **how questions are designed and implemented**
- Protect student privacy under **existing** federal and state law



## OTHER STATES ARE ALREADY DOING THIS:

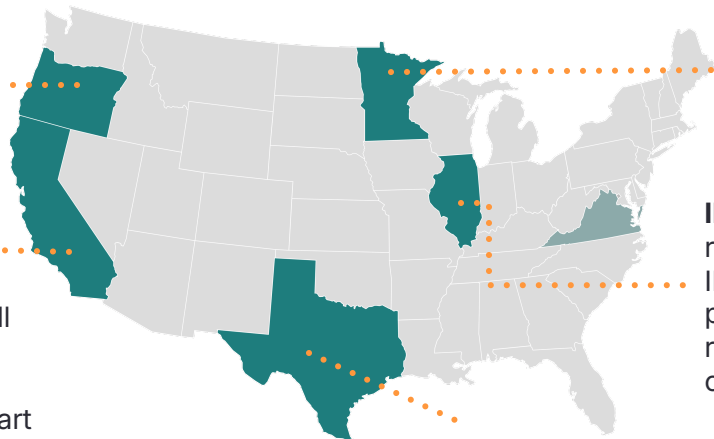
Virginia would be joining a growing, bipartisan national movement.



Across states, legislation has been **bipartisan, low-cost, and widely supported by institutions** with clear implementation guidance.

**Oregon** – First state to require a student parent identifier; coordinated through the statewide higher education commission

**California** – Embedded parenting status in systemwide data that will be used to recalculate cost of attendance for parenting students, as part of a broader student success and affordability framework



**Minnesota** – Integrated data collection with campus navigators and protections

**Illinois** – Data collection and reporting is overseen by the Illinois Board of Education, and policy requires disaggregated reporting to better understand outcomes

**Texas** – Requires annual reporting and campus liaisons for student parents

## GOOD DATA HELPS INFORM GOOD POLICY:

Tracking student parenting status is a common sense step forward.

- It aligns with Virginia's workforce and talent goals
- It improves the return on existing higher education investments
- It strengthens families while supporting credential completion
- It positions the Commonwealth to design smarter, more targeted policy, not guesswork



**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Tracking student parenting status is a practical, proven step toward a **more effective higher education system** that works for today's learners and tomorrow's workforce.