



Today's Students: **A Policy Roadmap for Student Parents in Illinois**

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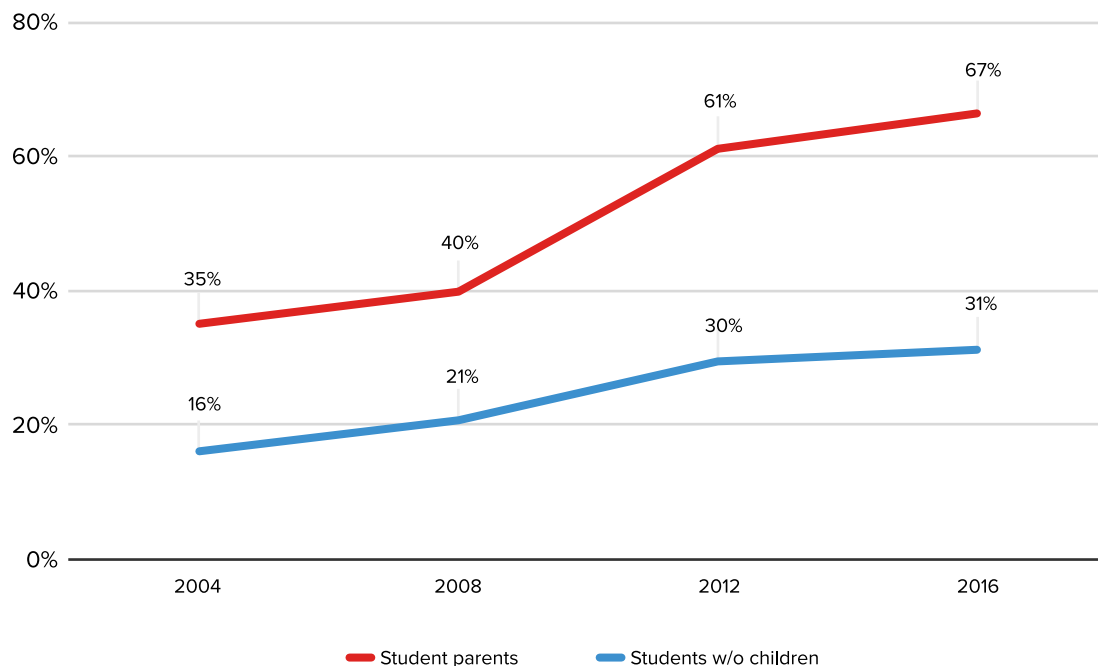
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INVINCIBLES

Despite the fact that more than one in five of today's college students are parents in America, higher education systems are often not set up to meet the needs of this important population.¹ Making college more accessible, affordable, and easier to complete is critical to the financial security of both generations, their communities, and our national and local economies. Parents attending college also experience unique challenges pursuing their degrees that must be addressed to meet broader higher education goals. For starters, they have less time: student parents can spend about one-third less time on their studies than their childless peers, spending additional hours caregiving and on household chores.²

student parents are
3.5 times less likely
to graduate than those
without children

Student parents also carry increased financial burdens: Nationally, nearly two-thirds of student parents receive no financial contribution from their family to pay for college, compared to less than a third for non-parents (Figure 1). Nationwide, student parents are entering college with no financial support at twice the rate they were in 2004. These factors contribute to lower graduation rates for student parents.³ In fact, students without children are three-and-a-half times more likely to earn a degree within six years than students with children (Figure 2).

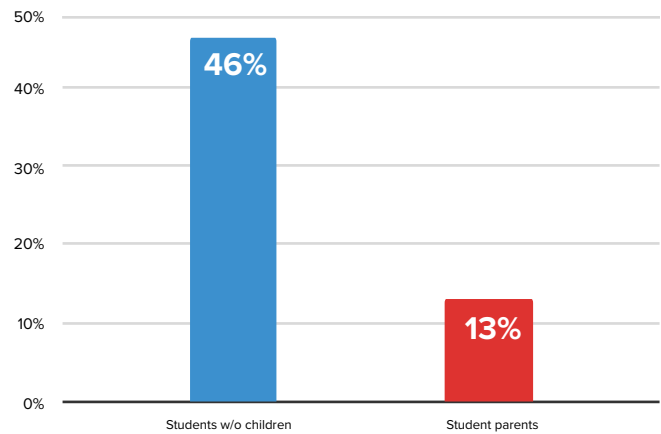
Figure 1: Percent of students w/ \$0 Expected Family Contribution



Source: NPSAS:16

This roadmap presents policies for Illinois policymakers to consider to make college more affordable for today's students. At least 14 percent of Illinois college students are parents and are balancing rising college prices with the struggle to meet their families' needs.⁴ Under the Lumina Foundation's Rule of 10, an affordability benchmark which states students should pay no more for college than 10 percent of their discretionary income for 10 years, and the earnings from working 10 hours a week while in school, only three percent of Illinois' four-year institutions are affordable for student parents.

Figure 2: Percent of students who earned a degree 6 years after starting college



Source: NPSAS:16

Establish an Attainment Goal and Collect Data About the Student Parent Experiences

While the increased focus on postsecondary attainment is encouraging, states need objective methods to determine whether they are meeting the needs of their residents. To accomplish this, it is important to adopt a statewide attainment goal, implement strategies to reach that goal, and measure progress. To successfully reach attainment goals, it is necessary to recognize how many college students are parents and identify the unique challenges they face pursuing postsecondary education. State agencies, systems, and institutions need to track the enrollment, progress, and completion of their student parent populations. Education systems and institutions should add basic flags of parenthood status, allowing for disaggregation of all other variables collected between parents and non-parents. The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit developed by Endicott College Program Evaluation & Research Group also provides a helpful framework for how states and institutions can evaluate the needs of student parents.⁵

at least 97,000 (14%) of Illinois college students are parents

Illinois has set a statewide attainment goal of 60 percent by 2025.⁶ Illinois is also in the process of setting disaggregated goals for people of color, with questions remaining on how to set goals that are achievable but also do not signal acceptance of race-based college attainment gaps. Illinois could also set a goal for student parents. Regardless, reaching their overall attainment goal will require a concerted emphasis on Illinois' nearly 100,000 student parents.

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Make Clear, Predictable Financial Commitments

While stakeholders point fingers over who is to blame for the rising costs of college, no one can argue that the rising prices delay students' path to success, and carry significant consequences for America's widening socio-economic and racial equity gaps. Making clear, predictable financial commitments, whether branded as "Promise" programs or increasing the numbers of institutions deemed affordable, equips policymakers with clear affordability goals and provides students and families with the assurance that they can afford a postsecondary education.

States should guarantee affordability for students along the following principles:

- Prioritize low-income students.
- Measure completion rates and incentivize improvement.
- Incorporate support for costs beyond tuition, including housing, food, transportation, and child care.

With only three percent of Illinois' four-year colleges affordable for student parents, the state should make improving affordability a priority.⁷ During his campaign for Governor, J.B. Pritzker called for expanding the Monetary Award Program (MAP) Grant by 50 percent and raising the maximum award level.⁸ This program should be supported because it has a strong track record, with MAP recipients graduating college at nearly the same rate as their peers at the same institutions.⁹

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Include Student Parents in State Child Care Programs

The federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which provides funds to states to help low-income parents pay for child care, allows states flexibility in determining program eligibility, including whether students pursuing education programs are eligible.¹⁰ Considering the benefit of each level of postsecondary attainment (lower unemployment and higher wages for each additional level), state child care programs can help student parents by allowing all programs, including baccalaureate and above, to count towards eligibility.¹¹

In 2018, Congress doubled CCDBG funding.¹² While states could choose to invest the additional funds in improving quality or investing in providers (grants for start-up costs, increasing payment rates, or increased training for special populations like infants), states could also focus on providing and promoting benefits for more college students.

Furthermore, Congress also infused the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program with additional funding, more than doubling federal dollars available to institutions to start and support child care centers on campus. States should encourage their institutions to apply for CCAMPIS support. Even institutions that already have childcare centers should pursue this funding, as an Institute for Women's Policy Research study found long waiting lists at 95 percent of the institutions they studied.¹³

While 67 percent of IL public institutions have child care centers on campus, only 19 percent of all Illinois institutions do, restricting student parents' ability to balance school and family. Illinois should include student parents in their state plan and use some of the \$82,813,000 in additional CCDBG funds the state stands to gain on student parents. The state should also encourage its institutions to apply for additional CCAMPIS funds.

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Adopt Evidence-Driven Completion Programs

Student parents experience higher education at the intersection of many socio-economic challenges, while balancing work, home, and school. Unfortunately, these challenges contribute to lower than average graduation rates. State programs can address multiple barriers simultaneously, providing academic and career advising, funding child care and transportation support, and professional development.

Programs like Arkansas' Career Pathways Initiative (CPI) have helped low-income student parents graduate community college at twice the state average.¹⁶ The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) mandates a on-time course scheduling and ongoing support from advisors and tutors. It also provides a mix of support

on tuition costs and non-tuition costs including MetroCards and textbooks. ASAP has proven highly effective, increasing overall enrollment rates and almost doubling on-time completion.¹⁷

States should adopt and support programs with these elements:

- Wrap-around case management that provides academic advising, but also connects student-parents to other resources.
- Support for tuition and non-tuition expenses like transportation and child care.
- Tracking of results and success.
- Professional development and soft-skills.

During his campaign, Illinois Governor-elect JB Pritzker promoted student success, specifically proposing to adopt the CUNY ASAP model. The Governor should fulfill this campaign promise, and work with the legislature to develop a student-success program that uses comprehensive case-management to support students' path to earning a degree.



End Notes

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4. This estimate, using the American Community Survey definition, potentially undercounts student parents by excluding both graduate students and students pursuing certificates, parents with with children living separately more than half the year, and potentially excluding part-time students.
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