



# Postsecondary National Policy Institute

## Student Parents

### POPULATION OVERVIEW

A significant portion of college students are raising children. Student parents often pursue postsecondary education as a pathway to economic mobility for themselves and their children, yet they are constrained by high education and caregiving costs, and by enrollment and persistence difficulties.<sup>6</sup> In 2019–20, about 18% of undergraduate students (roughly 3.14 million) had at least one dependent child. This marked a decline from 22% in 2015–16 and 26% in 2011–12.<sup>5</sup> Student parent demographics vary. About 88% of undergraduate student parents are ages 25 and older, 74% are female, 55% are people of color, and 36% live at or below the poverty line.<sup>5</sup>

### ENROLLMENT

- Undergraduate enrollment patterns differ by parental status across institution sectors. In 2019–20:
  - 37.2% of undergraduate student parents attended public two-year institutions, compared to 27.5% of undergraduates with no dependent children.<sup>5</sup>
  - 22.4% of undergraduate student parents attended public four-year institutions, compared to 40.6% of undergraduates with no dependent children.<sup>5</sup>
  - 16.2% of undergraduate student parents attended for-profit institutions, compared to 4% of undergraduates with no dependent children.<sup>5</sup>
  - 11% of undergraduate student parents attended private four-year institutions, compared to 16.2% of undergraduates with no dependent children.<sup>5</sup>
- Graduate student enrollment patterns also differ by parental status across institutional sectors. In 2019–20:
  - 39.6% of graduate student parents attended public four-year institutions, compared to 46% of graduate students with no dependents.<sup>5</sup>
  - 39.2% of graduate student parents attended private four-year institutions, compared to 42.8% of graduate students with no dependents.<sup>5</sup>
  - 15.8% of graduate student parents attended for-profit institutions, compared to 6.2% of graduate students with no dependents.<sup>5</sup>
- Nearly 28% of graduate students had at least one dependent child in 2019–20.<sup>5</sup>
- 27.3% of female undergraduates had at least one dependent child in 2019–20, compared to 11.4% of male undergraduates.<sup>5</sup>
- Roughly 60% of undergraduate student parents work full-time while enrolled, and 62% take on a less-than-full-time course load.<sup>5</sup>

### FINANCIAL AID

- In 2019–20, 62.8% of undergrads with dependent children received Title IV financial aid, compared to 53.1% of undergrad students with no dependent children.<sup>5</sup>

- The average aid amount for student parents was \$7,960, compared with \$8,923 for non-parent students.<sup>5</sup>
- 56.9% of student parents received a Pell Grant in 2019–20, compared to only 36.5% of non-student parents.<sup>5</sup>
  - Of students receiving a Pell Grant, the average amount for student parents was \$3,860, compared to \$4,211 for non-parent students.<sup>5</sup>
- Student parents and non-parent students relied on federal loans to a similar degree. 36.8% of undergraduate students with dependent children received a federal loan, compared with 34% of students without dependent children.<sup>5</sup>
  - Among students with federal loans, the average amount in 2019–20 was \$7,362 for student parents, compared with \$8,854 for non-parent students.<sup>5</sup>

## COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

- 19.3% of undergraduates with dependent children pursuing bachelor’s degrees graduated within six years, while 61.7% of undergraduates without dependent children graduated in the same time.<sup>3</sup>

## EARNINGS AND WEALTH

- Ten years after receiving a bachelor’s degree, graduates who had children at the time of graduation reported having an average gross income of \$76,169, on par with the national average.<sup>2</sup>
- Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income.<sup>7</sup> Ten years after graduating:
  - 70.8% of student-parent graduates reported owning a home, compared to 61.4% of non-parent graduates.<sup>2</sup>
  - 84.8% of student-parent graduates had a retirement account, comparable to 86.8% of non-parent graduates.<sup>2</sup>

## POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Nearly half (45.8%) of undergraduate student parents have children under age 6.<sup>5</sup>
- More than half (55.4%) of undergraduate student parents have more than one dependent child.<sup>5</sup>
- Among student parents who pay for childcare, the average monthly expenditure is \$575.<sup>5</sup>

## DATA SOURCES

<sup>1</sup>[American Community Survey & Current Population Survey](#). U.S. Census Bureau, April 2024.

<sup>2</sup>[Baccalaureate & Beyond Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>3</sup>[Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>4</sup>[Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#). National Center for Education Statistics, January 2026.

<sup>5</sup>[National Postsecondary Student Aid Study](#). National Center for Education Statistics, November 2023.

<sup>6</sup>[The Financial Well-Being of Parents Pursuing Postsecondary Education](#). SPARK Collaborative, November 2024.

<sup>7</sup>[Wealth Analysis FAQ](#). Urban Institute, 2021.