



CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TWO GENERATIONS, TO SUPPORT STUDENT PARENTS

Creating opportunities for both children and parents through intentional, holistic approaches can lead to more effective programs and policies for Coloradans. Improving the outcomes for both families and children by strengthening the system of services that support them is at the core of two-generation approaches. When the needs of children are being addressed, parents are better able to explore their own hopes and opportunities; and when parents are more secure in their own opportunities, they will be better able to support the healthy development of their young children.

Building upon the lessons of programs supporting student parents and their children, Colorado can expand upon two-generation approaches to better address equity barriers and provide opportunities for all Coloradans to succeed.

WHY USE A TWO-GENERATION APPROACH FOR STUDENT PARENTS?

Families, especially those in marginalized communities and enduring poverty, encounter multiple social stressors that make it particularly difficult for parents to access what they need to build a strong foundation for themselves and their children. In fact, **nationally**:

1 in 5

undergraduate college students are parents, out of which 42% are enrolled in community colleges¹

53%

of student parents have children under age 6²

52%

of student parents drop out of college without a degree or certificate, compared with a third (32%) of students without children⁶

College students who are parents are more likely to be mothers, people of color, and older than students without children³

The number of college students who are parents has declined by about 15% in recent years⁴ due to unemployment, as well as the rising cost of college and living expenses⁵



“Having somebody who supports you in that is important because it can be intimidating being in a college setting and having kids.”

—Student parent

In Colorado:



Lack of childcare is **one of the most significant barriers** to college enrollment and completion ⁷

51% of people live in childcare deserts— areas without enough licensed childcare providers—and the supply is especially low for Hispanic/Latino (53%) and low-income (55%) families ⁸

29% of public community colleges in the state **offer on-campus childcare**, and many have limited availability and restrictive hours ⁹

The **price of childcare surpasses the suggested 10% of annual budget** based on income; in Denver it is 49% of the median income for single-mother families ¹⁰

COMPONENTS OF THE STRENGTHENING WORKING FAMILIES INITIATIVE (SWFI)

With funding from the Department of Labor and Employment, the Strengthening Working Families Initiative (SWFI) in Colorado has been established to help parents access jobs in high-demand industries such as healthcare, information technology and advanced manufacturing, while addressing barriers to accessible and high-quality childcare as a sustainable solution to help parents achieve independence and self-sufficiency and support positive child development.

This initiative boosts the power of community college education, childcare and employment systems in Denver, Arapahoe and Adams counties by providing the following:

"They have everything you need. They make my life and my family's life be on track."

—Student parent

"Childcare is just the biggest thing. I mean being a single mom is the hardest thing you ever do, I think, and you don't have anyone else to help."

—Student parent

Tuition support:

to leverage financial aid scholarships and grants to cover costs of education, including transportation

College bridging:

to help nontraditional students prepare for college classes

Academic coaching:

to navigate higher education systems

Career advisor:

to help with job placement and retention through both hard and soft skills as well as employment training

Childcare navigator:

to identify and navigate childcare options and leverage available financial support

"I'm studying right now to be a patient care technician, but once I complete my certificate, I'm going to re-enroll back into school and then complete my associate's in general studies."

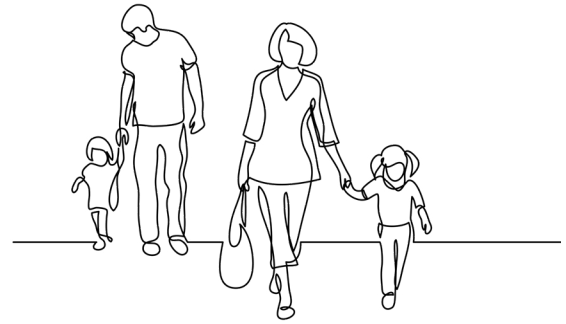
—Student parent



Dollar flexibility. One of the most uncommon and beneficial aspects of the SWFI is the discretion on dollars that students are granted, allowing them to decide how they spend their allocations. Because of the many demands on them, student parents often face unexpected expenses that determine the extent of their engagement in school. Flexible funds are a way to keep parents engaged and retrained.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR FAMILIES AND THE LARGER COMMUNITY?

The first three years of brain development are foundational for children and extremely influential for parents, making this time period for families a key opportunity for change.¹¹ Increasing parents' educational and financial attainment promotes positive short- and long-term outcomes for both adults and children. Moreover, increasing access to higher-quality early childhood education programs has been proven to impact cognitive outcomes as well as children's social skills and school progress.¹²



More time spent combining work and education among parents is associated with **several hundred dollars** in higher earnings at age 30.¹³

People with associate degrees **earn, on average, 22% more** than those with only high school degrees.¹⁴

\$3,000 more invested in early childhood education **results in 17% higher incomes for those children** later in life.¹⁵

Parents' education level **significantly predicts educational and occupational success** for the child 40 years later.¹⁶

WHAT HAS THIS MEANT FOR SWFI FAMILIES?

As families are supported through SWFI, parents get access to education and jobs at the same time children enter higher-quality childcare, which together create improved building blocks for a brighter future.

Of 176 students that accessed supports through SWFI at Community College of Aurora and Community College of Denver in 2018–2019:

"Especially with kids, it's really hard. I would not be able to go back to classes without the childcare. I'm very grateful."

—Student parent

33%

have completed courses and obtained a degree or credential, compared with about 10% of the general community college student population

Nearly 1/3

(28%) have obtained employment

\$18,674

have been provided to student parents through scholarships for supportive services (e.g., transportation, rent, food, etc.)

\$34,064

of the scholarship money provided to students has been allocated to childcare expenses

54% are still enrolled and working toward graduation

"I completed the certificate course (22 credit hours) in three semesters with a 4.0 cumulative GPA including two industry certifications and landed in the new job as IT Associate Level II with Amazon.com inc."

—Student parent



"They do help you navigate through the whole school process all the way from childcare to resumes to helping you figure out financial aid and stuff like that."

—Student parent

PROGRAMMATIC STRATEGIES

The following are recommendations based on supports that were beneficial to student parents participating in SWFI: ^{17 18 19 20}



DEDICATE RESOURCES

Establish task or action groups that may bring together dedicated people to focus on student parent issues and specifically address needs unique to the target population

This dedication should be across the board. Various levels of systems must be engaged in efforts, which also should reflect diverse and cross-sector perspectives that are not only looking at programs but also at policies

“With that kind of collaboration, we may have a future that is a more cohesive pipeline for children from birth all the way through college successfully.”

—Learning Community Member



REFRAME

Adopt and employ metaphors and concepts that are shared or commonly understood, as well as strengths-based language that gets away from stigma-inducing and vulnerability notions



INTEGRATE

Construct a narrative that tells a more complete picture and integrates the lives of families, including the positive influence both parents and children have on each other (i.e., children are a motivator for parents' education, not a detractor)



REENGAGE

Reengage parents who are disconnected from work and education through outreach, and offer transition support, including acknowledgment of student parents' presence, direct outreach to this population group, help with enrollment, preparation to transition, and information on resources available

“It empowered me in multiple ways. With the new job I got a sense of inner confidence and security. It created a sense of respect towards me from my children as they see their mom going to school like them. Now they know their mom can mentor them at the time of need.”

—Student parent



BE ACCESSIBLE

Provide academic services, including academic advising, tutoring and skill-building supports; be willing to accommodate complex schedules, and make hybrid courses available



GIVE ONE-ON-ONE SUPPORT

Provide mentoring, including counseling services, and have trained staff understand needs, make referrals and provide screening



ENABLE PEER CONNECTION

Facilitate peer support opportunities, access to classes on relevant topics, and use of a centralized platform for student parents to communicate with each other



OFFER NAVIGATION

Employ a childcare navigator to support parent students in applying for childcare subsidies, finding high-quality childcare, and planning for childcare needs as school and employment situations change

Have campus-organized childcare or provide assistance by identifying care in the community or through information on public subsidies or private resources to cover costs, such as Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and other financial aid

Create a parent center or a virtual one-stop shop where all information lives to facilitate streamlined access to resources

Facilitate links to economic, community and health services, such as coordinated access to benefits

Secure affordable housing through partnerships that may provide residential opportunities including counseling, an on-site care center, case management, academic advising and family support services

“That daycare issue, if [student parents] are not prepared for it, can really trip them up. We help them with a backup plan, or if they’ve lost their access to a childcare or daycare program, then the navigator can help relocate based on their availability and affordability.”

—Learning Community Member



BE FLEXIBLE

Allow discretionary spending of dollars allotted so students may cover emerging and emergency expenses in ways that best accommodate their needs and permit their continued engagement in school

Give parents the freedom to choose childcare providers that best fit their needs, which is especially impactful in childcare desert areas and during breaks from school (i.e., gaps between semesters or during other times when CCCAP may restrict access because of timing or requirements)

Discretionary funds should allow for the coverage of other non-tuition expenses, including books, groceries, gas and supplies for children, as well as direct financial support, such as coaching for budgeting and financial planning

“[My navigator] is really welcoming, I tell her about any and everything. I just called her when I was downtown, I got lost. I called her. So she tried to help me as much as possible. Like every time I call her she follows up with me, immediately, with anything.”

—Student parent

“It’s not just about budgeting, but it’s really more about understanding the values and then how to put goals together so that when you look at your first paycheck you know where those are going and that they’re going to be meeting the goals that you have for your financial resources.”

—Student parent



GIVE LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Provide training around finances so student parents may learn to budget appropriately and acquire a more holistic understanding of economic health for their families

Weave participatory assessments into the fabric of programs, and incorporate the voices of parents so that programs and institutions become accountable to families and the community at large

LISTEN



WHAT LESSONS AND TOOLS CAN BE APPLIED TO OTHER SETTINGS?

- Developing **connections to high-quality childcare that meets the needs and schedules of parents** is at the core of success but is also one of the most challenging components.
- **Providing navigation is critical, and navigation needs to be comprehensive.** Parents may need navigation for several areas, including community benefits and services, the college itself, and employment opportunities.
- Connecting parents to existing childcare subsidies is essential, but **parents often need “gap funding” for immediate childcare needs** as their application is being processed.
- **Offering flexible funding** for costs beyond just the program (i.e., costs beyond just tuition) allows parents to meet the vast array of needs they may encounter while pursuing advancement opportunities.
- Creating **family-friendly locations on-site** is important both to show that parents are welcome and to provide parents and their children with practical space.
- Identifying parents early is key to being able to develop successful programs. **Proactive data collection, recruitment and identification** of parents are needed to successfully engage parents in programs.
- Understanding the long-term success of two-generation approaches will require **greater access to employment and child success data.** State agencies should work to provide this information in a manner that protects privacy while allowing for strong evaluations of promising practices.

A TWO-GENERATION OPPORTUNITY

Starting programs such as SWFI can help to initiate larger two-generation conversations within a community college. Furthermore, its larger lessons can apply to other settings where parents are trying to advance, in areas such as workforce development training. This initiative and similar services serve as models for providing supports to families that can potentially increase postsecondary education enrollment, transfer and completion rates; close equity gaps; and improve employment rates. SWFI has also helped uncover innovative ways in which the complex needs of families may be met to make a measurable difference for parents and their children as they seek to achieve financial advancement and well-being.

Considering the replication of two-generation approaches such as SWFI across the community college system and beyond can help increase awareness and understanding of the importance of looking at a family as a whole and, ultimately, providing equitable supports that result in positive outcomes for the community at large.

SWFI efforts in Colorado have been made possible with U.S. Department of Labor and Gary Community Investments funds, as well as through the joint work of:



LEARN MORE AND FIND RESOURCES AT WWW.CO-SWFI.COM

SOURCES

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