

The task force is to prepare a report on “parenting students” which is to include:

- An assessment of the current status of parenting student data collection.
- Recommendations for implementing statewide data collection for higher education institutions which should include suggestions for consistent question phrasing, modes of data collection that will assess parenting status over the length of the students’ enrollment.

The report and recommendations are to be presented to the legislative health and human services committee and other appropriate legislative interim committees by November 1, 2026.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

Memorials do not carry funding. There will be costs associated with the task force. These costs would be absorbed by HED and institutions.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Nationally approximately 30% of students at community colleges care for dependent children. Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) conducted a student survey in spring 2024 (see below). The average age of parenting students at SFCC is 38 and has one child. Thirty-nine percent of the SFCC students have a child under the age of 6. Over 80% are working while going to school – with 60% working full-time.

Per the 2024 survey, the top 5 reasons a parenting student attends SFCC are:

- To increase their earning potential.
- To be an inspiration for their children or other family members.
- To change careers or re-enter the workforce after time away.
- To fulfill their dream of earning a degree.
- To learn for learning’s sake.

The report starts on the next page.

Figure 4. Genders (n = 642)

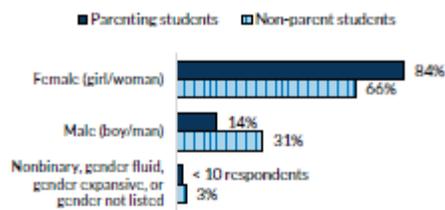
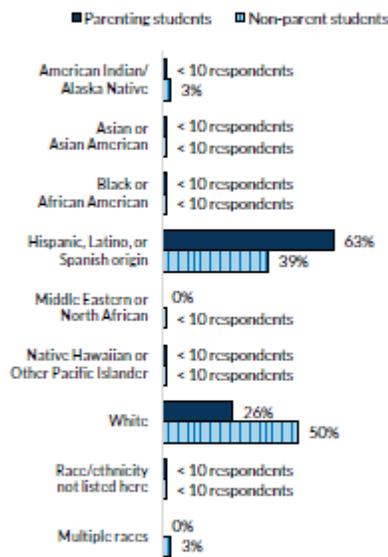


Figure 5. Racial/ethnic identities (n = 627)



Note: All groups other than Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are non-Hispanic.

Figure 6. First-generation college students (n = 660)

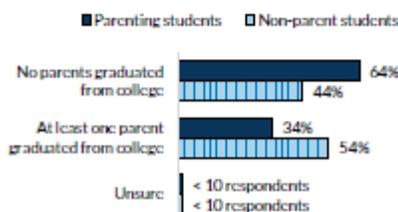


Figure 7. Employment (n = 766)

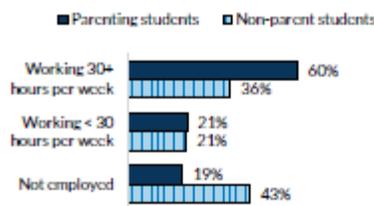
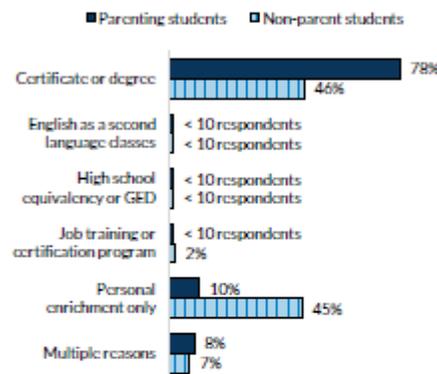


Figure 8. Reasons for taking classes (n = 766)



Parenting students engage with college in diverse ways

The vast majority (78%) of parenting students are taking college classes to earn a certificate or degree (see Figure 8), with 72% attending SFCC part-time (see Figure 9). No one format for classes works for all parenting students, but more than a third (35%) of parenting students prefer to take classes online asynchronously (see Figure 10).

Figure 9. Enrollment (n = 758)

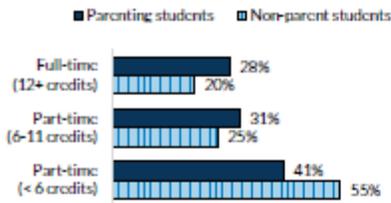
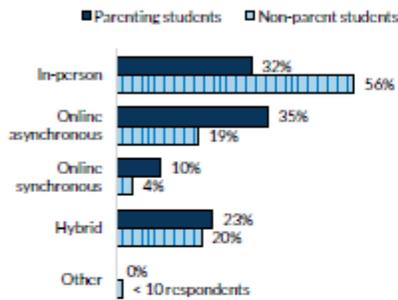


Figure 10. Preferences for class instruction (n = 678)



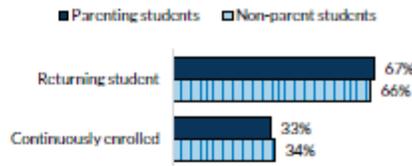
Parenting students, motivated by their futures, take non-direct pathways through school

Many students, including parenting students, take a break from school and come back as returning students, including 67% of parenting students at SFCC, compared to 66% of non-parenting students (see Figure 11).

Parenting students' top reasons for returning to SFCC are:

- To increase their earning potential (56%)
- To be an inspiration for their children or other family members (46%)
- To change careers or re-enter the workforce after time away (37%)
- To fulfill their dream of earning a degree (37%)
- To learn for learning's sake (34%)

Figure 11. Returning college students (n = 715)



Parenting students face many specific challenges while pursuing their dreams

While all students experience a range of obstacles during their time in school, parenting students often have additional family responsibilities, financial obligations, and time commitments outside of school that may make it hard to reach their academic goals (see Figure 14). At SFCC, many parenting students struggle to meet their basic needs (see Figure 12). Many parenting students also struggle with mental health (see Figure 13).

Figure 12. Financial security and stability

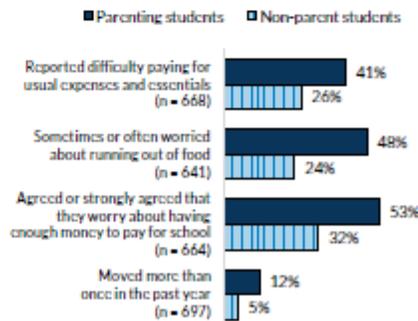


Figure 13. Mental health

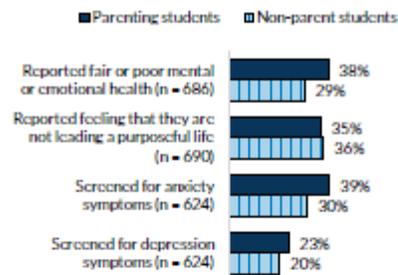
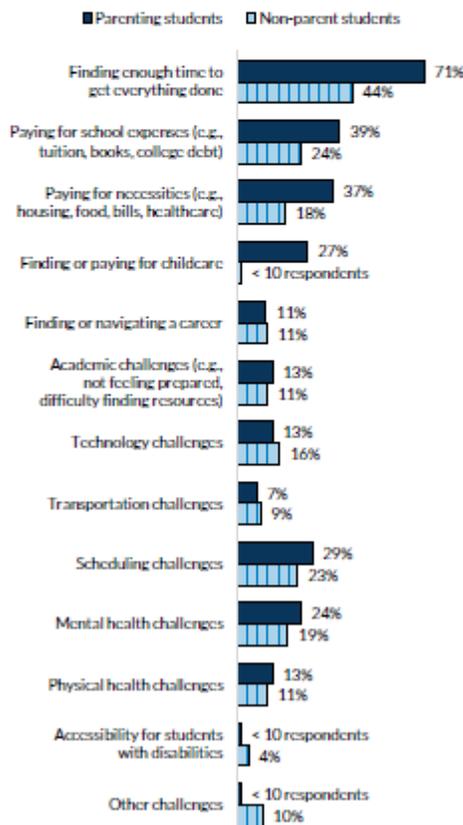


Figure 14. Challenges experienced in school (n = 725)



Parenting students have a range of childcare needs and preferences

Nine percent of parenting student respondents currently use on-campus childcare, and 28% say they prefer on-campus childcare. Notably, 18% of respondents at SFCC said that their current childcare arrangements do not cover most or all of the hours they need (see Figure 16), and 27% identified finding or paying for childcare as a challenge (see Figure 14).

Parenting students at SFCC currently depend on an array of childcare options (see Figure 15):

- 30% have no childcare arrangements
- 30% rely on an unpaid friend or relative
- 20% rely on a childcare center or preschool

Figure 15. Current and preferred childcare arrangements for children ages 13 and under (n = 122 & 120, respectively)

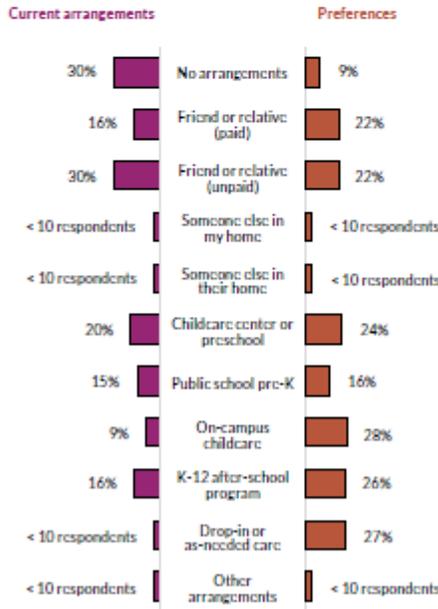
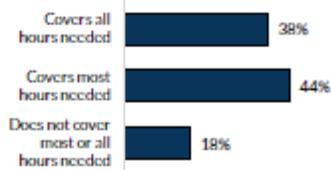


Figure 16. Current childcare coverage (n = 120)



Parenting students desire school-based supports and services

Schools can help mitigate challenges and support parenting students by offering or strengthening various on-campus supports and services. Parenting students at SFCC express interest in several key supports (see Figure 17) and services (see Figure 18).

The top three supports that parenting students indicated they would use are:

- Outdoor play spaces
- Family-friendly study spaces where children are welcome
- A campus food pantry

The top three services they would use are:

- Free family/children's activities and events
- Individual or family counseling
- Drop-in on-campus childcare for a few hours at a time

Figure 17. Desired supports (n = 157)

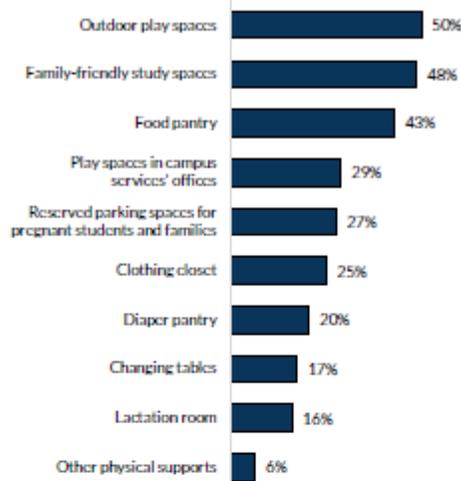
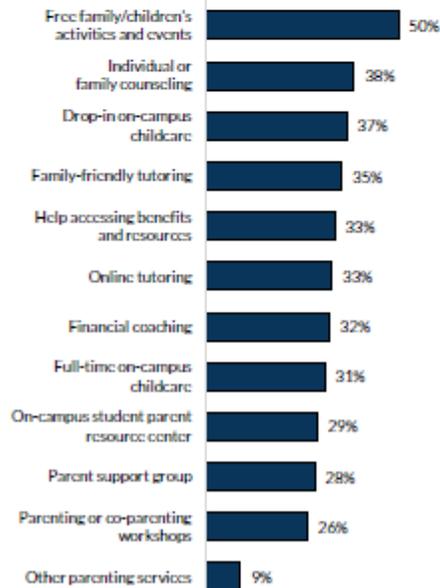


Figure 18. Desired services (n = 156)



Parenting students need classes, services, and supports that fit their schedules

Schools can also help meet parenting students' specific needs by offering a range of times for class instruction and inclusive hours for on-campus supports and services. At SFCC, many parenting students (47%) prefer to take classes that are in person or with live virtual instruction in the mornings (see Figure 19). Likewise, many parenting students (38%) prefer to access physical supports and services in the mornings (see Figure 20).

Figure 19. Preferred time of day to take classes in person or with live virtual instruction (n = 647)

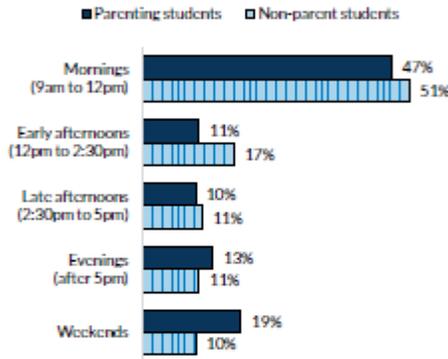
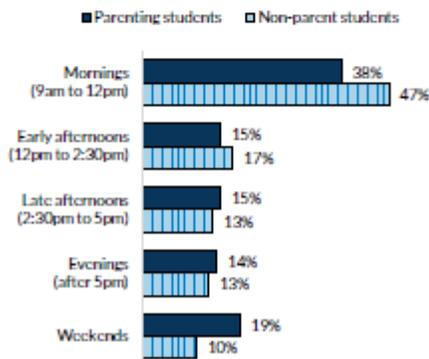


Figure 20. Preferred time of day to access physical supports and services (n = 526)



Methods

Students at nine higher education institutions in New Mexico responded to an online survey in Spring 2024, co-developed by Santa Fe Community College and national research partner Child Trends. 832 students at Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) responded, including 172 parenting students. To protect students' confidentiality, we suppressed the survey findings with fewer than 10 responses.

Full details on methods can be found in the state summary report, *Survey of Parenting Students in New Mexico Helps Us Understand Their Needs*, at www.childtrends.org.

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Note: Zabryna Balén and Katelyn Rust share joint first authorship.

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