LFC Requester:		Jorgensen

AGENCY BILL ANALYSIS - 2026 REGULAR SESSION

WITHIN 24 HOURS OF BILL POSTING, UPLOAD ANALYSIS TO
AgencyAnalysis.nmlegis.gov and email to billanalysis@dfa.nm.gov
(Analysis must be uploaded as a PDF)

SECTION I: GENERAL INFORMATION
{Indicate if analysis is on an original bill, amendment, substitute or a correction of a previous bill}

Date Prepared: *February 2, 2026*   *Check all that apply:*
Bill Number: *SM 16*   Original ___ _x_ Correction __
   Amendment __ Substitute __

Sponsor: Jaramillo	**Agency Name and Code Number**: NM Independent Community Colleges 994
Short Title: Data on Parenting Students in Higher Ed.	**Person Writing Phone:** Vanessa K. Hawker **Email** vhawker@hawkerhynson.com

SECTION II: FISCAL IMPACT

(Parenthesis ( ) indicate revenue decreases)

ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL OPERATING BUDGET IMPACT (dollars in thousands)

	FY26	FY27	FY28	3 Year Total Cost	Recurring or Nonrecurring	Fund Affected
Total		Indeterminate			N	Agency & Institution Budgets

(Parenthesis ( ) Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SECTION III: NARRATIVE

BILL SUMMARY

Synopsis: Senate Memorial 16 (SM 16) requests the higher education department (HED) to convene a task force to study, develop recommendations, and draft legislation for collecting data on parenting students.

The task force is to include:
- Staff from at least two four-year public institutions, including research and student services staff.
- Staff from at least two two-year community colleges, including research and student services staff.
- Staff from a tribal college or university.
- Parenting students from at least two public colleges or universities.
- A member of the children's cabinet.
- A representative from HED's data advisory group.
- A representative from the New Mexico student parent alliance.

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.
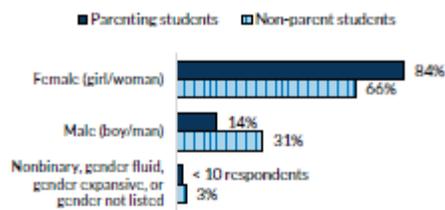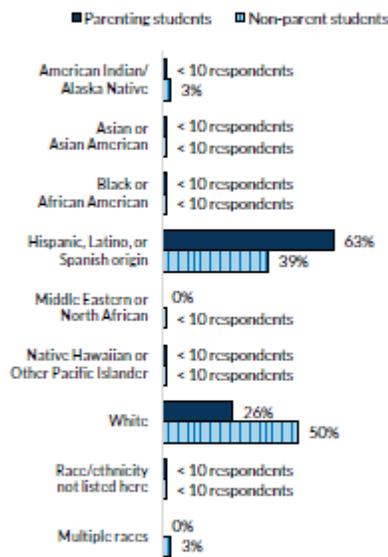
Figure 4. Genders (n = 642)

■ Parenting students ■ Non-parent students

- Female (girl/woman): 84% / 66%
- Male (boy/man): 14% / 31%
- Nonbinary, gender fluid, gender expansive, or gender not listed: < 10 respondents / 3%

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

■ Parenting students ■ Non-parent students

- American Indian/Alaska Native: < 10 respondents / 3%
- Asian or Asian American: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- Black or African American: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin: 63% / 39%
- Middle Eastern or North African: 0% / < 10 respondents
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- White: 26% / 50%
- Race/ethnicity not listed here: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- Multiple races: 0% / 3%

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

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

■ Parenting students ■ Non-parent students
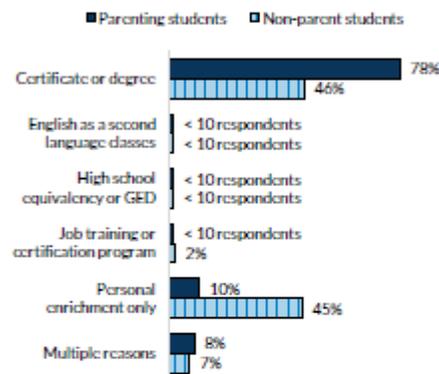
- No parents graduated from college: 64% / 44%
- At least one parent graduated from college: 34% / 54%
- Unsure: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
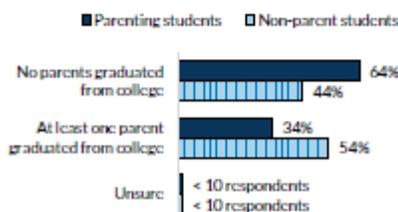
Figure 7. Employment (n = 766)

■ Parenting students ■ Non-parent students

- Working 30+ hours per week: 60% / 36%
- Working < 30 hours per week: 21% / 21%
- Not employed: 19% / 43%
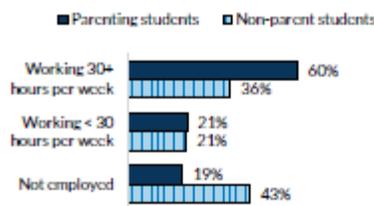
Figure 8. Reasons for taking classes (n = 766)

■ Parenting students ■ Non-parent students

- Certificate or degree: 78% / 46%
- English as a second language classes: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- High school equivalency or GED: < 10 respondents / < 10 respondents
- Job training or certification program: < 10 respondents / 2%
- Personal enrichment only: 10% / 45%
- Multiple reasons: 8% / 7%

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).
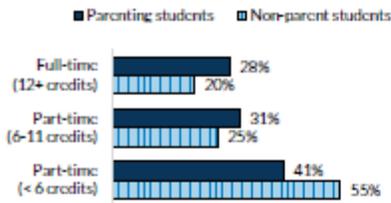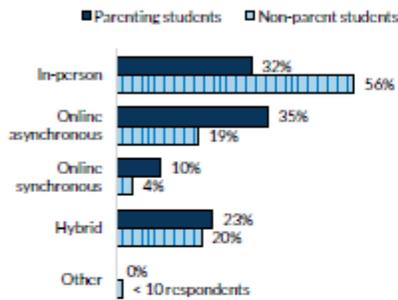
Figure 9. Enrollment (n = 758)

■ Parenting students　▥ Non-parent students

Full-time (12+ credits)	28% / 20%
Part-time (6-11 credits)	31% / 25%
Part-time (< 6 credits)	41% / 55%

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

■ Parenting students　▥ Non-parent students

In-person	32% / 56%
Online asynchronous	35% / 19%
Online synchronous	10% / 4%
Hybrid	23% / 20%
Other	0% / < 10 respondents

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,[6] 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　▥ Non-parent students

Returning student	67% / 66%
Continuously enrolled	33% / 34%
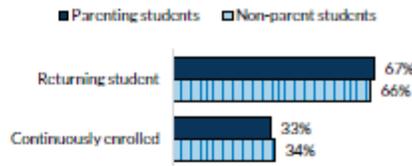
Parenting students face many specific challenges while pursuing their dreams

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).

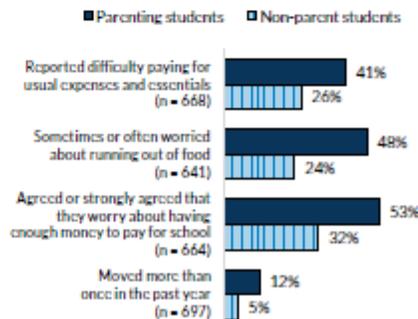**Figure 12.** Financial security and stability

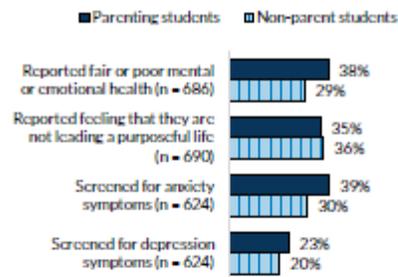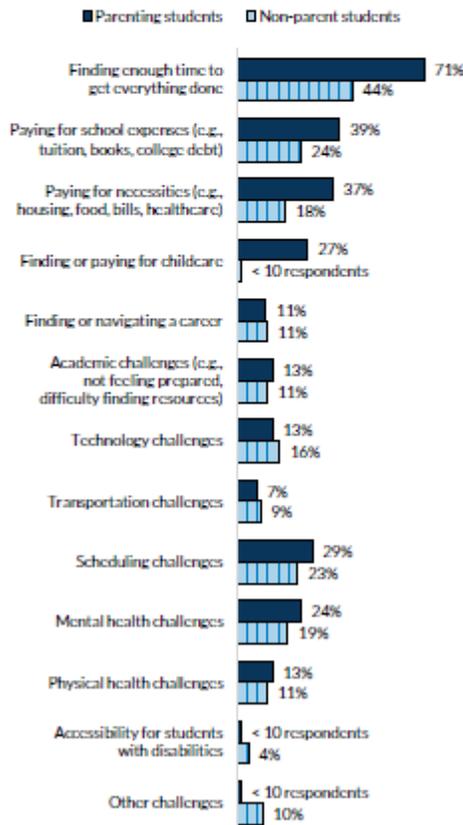■ Parenting students　▥ Non-parent students

Reported difficulty paying for usual expenses and essentials (n = 668)	41% / 26%
Sometimes or often worried about running out of food (n = 641)	48% / 24%
Agreed or strongly agreed that they worry about having enough money to pay for school (n = 664)	53% / 32%
Moved more than once in the past year (n = 697)	12% / 5%

Figure 13. Mental health

■ Parenting students　▫ Non-parent students

Reported fair or poor mental or emotional health (n = 686)
- Parenting students: 38%
- Non-parent students: 29%

Reported feeling that they are not leading a purposeful life (n = 690)
- Parenting students: 35%
- Non-parent students: 36%

Screened for anxiety symptoms (n = 624)
- Parenting students: 39%
- Non-parent students: 30%

Screened for depression symptoms (n = 624)
- Parenting students: 23%
- Non-parent students: 20%

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

■ Parenting students　▫ Non-parent students

Finding enough time to get everything done
- Parenting students: 71%
- Non-parent students: 44%

Paying for school expenses (e.g., tuition, books, college debt)
- Parenting students: 39%
- Non-parent students: 24%

Paying for necessities (e.g., housing, food, bills, healthcare)
- Parenting students: 37%
- Non-parent students: 18%

Finding or paying for childcare
- Parenting students: 27%
- Non-parent students: < 10 respondents

Finding or navigating a career
- Parenting students: 11%
- Non-parent students: 11%

Academic challenges (e.g., not feeling prepared, difficulty finding resources)
- Parenting students: 13%
- Non-parent students: 11%

Technology challenges
- Parenting students: 13%
- Non-parent students: 16%

Transportation challenges
- Parenting students: 7%
- Non-parent students: 9%

Scheduling challenges
- Parenting students: 29%
- Non-parent students: 23%

Mental health challenges
- Parenting students: 24%
- Non-parent students: 19%

Physical health challenges
- Parenting students: 13%
- Non-parent students: 11%

Accessibility for students with disabilities
- Parenting students: < 10 respondents
- Non-parent students: 4%

Other challenges
- Parenting students: < 10 respondents
- Non-parent students: 10%

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)
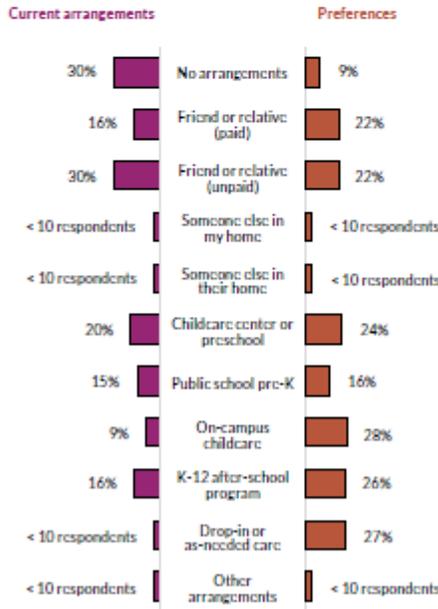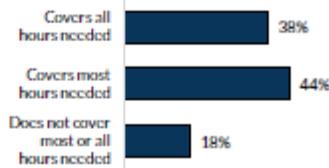
Current arrangements | | **Preferences**

No arrangements
- Current: 30%
- Preferences: 9%

Friend or relative (paid)
- Current: 16%
- Preferences: 22%

Friend or relative (unpaid)
- Current: 30%
- Preferences: 22%

Someone else in my home
- Current: < 10 respondents
- Preferences: < 10 respondents

Someone else in their home
- Current: < 10 respondents
- Preferences: < 10 respondents

Childcare center or preschool
- Current: 20%
- Preferences: 24%

Public school pre-K
- Current: 15%
- Preferences: 16%

On-campus childcare
- Current: 9%
- Preferences: 28%

K-12 after-school program
- Current: 16%
- Preferences: 26%

Drop-in or as-needed care
- Current: < 10 respondents
- Preferences: 27%

Other arrangements
- Current: < 10 respondents
- Preferences: < 10 respondents

Figure 16. Current childcare coverage (n = 120)

Category	Percentage
Covers all hours needed	38%
Covers most hours needed	44%
Does not cover most or all hours needed	18%

Figure 17. Desired supports (n = 157)

Support	Percentage
Outdoor play spaces	50%
Family-friendly study spaces	48%
Food pantry	43%
Play spaces in campus services' offices	29%
Reserved parking spaces for pregnant students and families	27%
Clothing closet	25%
Diaper pantry	20%
Changing tables	17%
Lactation room	16%
Other physical supports	6%

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 18. Desired services (n = 156)

Service	Percentage
Free family/children's activities and events	50%
Individual or family counseling	38%
Drop-in on-campus childcare	37%
Family-friendly tutoring	35%
Help accessing benefits and resources	33%
Online tutoring	33%
Financial coaching	32%
Full-time on-campus childcare	31%
On-campus student parent resource center	29%
Parent support group	28%
Parenting or co-parenting workshops	26%
Other parenting services	9%

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)

■ Parenting students ☐ Non-parent students

- Mornings (9am to 12pm): 47% / 51%
- Early afternoons (12pm to 2:30pm): 11% / 17%
- Late afternoons (2:30pm to 5pm): 10% / 11%
- Evenings (after 5pm): 13% / 11%
- Weekends: 19% / 10%
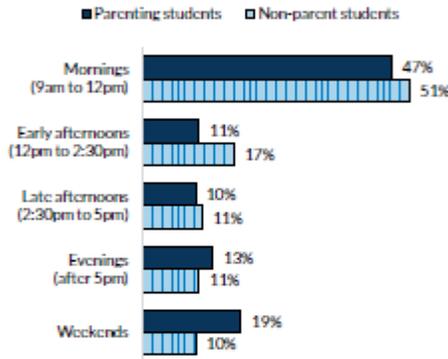
Figure 20. Preferred time of day to access physical supports and services (n = 526)

■ Parenting students ☐ Non-parent students

- Mornings (9am to 12pm): 38% / 47%
- Early afternoons (12pm to 2:30pm): 15% / 17%
- Late afternoons (2:30pm to 5pm): 15% / 13%
- Evenings (after 5pm): 14% / 13%
- Weekends: 19% / 10%
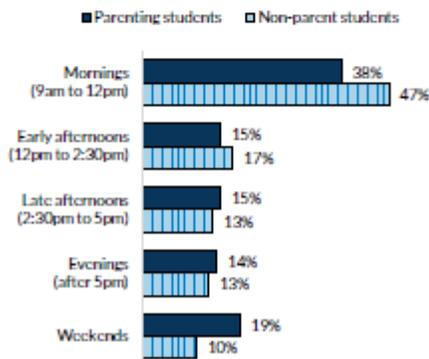
Methods

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.

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

The authors are grateful to the students who participated in this survey and the institutions that made it possible, including New Mexico Independent Community Colleges, the Santa Fe Community College Student Parent Success Program, and the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness.

Suggested citation: Balén, Z., Rust, K., & Ryberg, R. (2024). *Parenting students at Santa Fe Community College.* Child Trends.

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

References

[1] Reichlin Cruse, L., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D., & Polk, P. (2019). *Parents in college by the numbers.* Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers/

[2] Wilsey, S. A. (2013). Comparisons of adult and traditional college-age student mothers: Reasons for college enrollment and views of how enrollment affects children. *Journal of College Student Development,* 54(2), 209-214. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2013.0018

[3] Reichlin Cruse, L., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D., & Polk, P. (2019). *Parents in college by the numbers.* Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/parents-in-college-by-the-numbers/

[4] Contreras-Mendez, S., & Reichlin Cruse, L. (2021). *Busy with purpose: Lessons for education and policy leaders from returning student parents.* Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/busy-with-purpose-lessons-for-education-and-policy-leaders-from-returning-student-parents/

[5] Urban Institute. (n.d.). *Student-parent families at the center.* https://www.urban.org/projects/student-parent-families-center

[6] Contreras-Mendez, S., & Reichlin Cruse, L. (2021). *Busy with purpose: Lessons for education and policy leaders from returning student parents.* Institute for Women's Policy Research. https://iwpr.org/busy-with-purpose-lessons-for-education-and-policy-leaders-from-returning-student-parents/