

Advancing Postsecondary Success for Parenting Students

Convening Summary

About one in five Washington postsecondary students are also parents of dependents, juggling multiple responsibilities and challenges in postsecondary systems that were not designed with their needs in mind.¹ On October 3, 2025, WSAC and partners convened 50 stakeholders to explore the landscape, challenges, local practices and partnerships, and strategic opportunities to increase support for parenting students.² Stakeholders shared the priority that the unique status and needs of parenting students should be recognized, and support to address parenting students' challenges should be increased at the levels of campus practices, community partnerships, and local and state investments.

Key Takeaways

1. **Data Collection:** Stakeholders agree that data collection is a top priority for action. Coordinated, aligned data collection on parenting status in postsecondary will make visible parenting students, their needs, and their postsecondary and workforce success. Data collection is essential for future investment needed to support parenting students and childcare.
2. **Campus-Based Practices:** Stakeholders explored campus-based practices to lower barriers for parenting students' success. Key practices include information and resources, creating a "family friendly" culture, training faculty and staff on parents' rights and needs, centering parenting students' voices in decision-making, and more. Sharing successful practices, like those shared by Pierce, Highline, and The Evergreen State colleges, can encourage adoption elsewhere.
3. **Apprenticeships and Workforce Development:** Childcare is a widespread and foundational need for parents in the workforce and in apprenticeships. Increased childcare availability for non-standard hours and flexible stipends to parents to cover costs are critical strategies to meet workforce needs that can be considered for replication or expansion. Stakeholders noted that employers and industries are essential partners in the co-design and funding of these strategies.
4. **Cross-Sector Community Partnerships:** Community partnerships, including school districts and community-based organizations, offer promising two-direction approaches for postsecondary success for parents. Partnerships can both support parents in accessing postsecondary pathways and can help current parenting students connect to needed childcare and resources. Stakeholders see promise in uplifting lessons from partnerships like Chehalis Cornerstone and fostering similar partnerships.

¹ [Designing Postsecondary Education for Parenting Students](#) (WSAC, 2025)

² See Appendices A and B for co-hosts, agenda and participation.

Participants discussed opportunity areas within practices and partnerships:*(See Appendix C for detailed contributions by sector)*

Theme	Opportunity areas
Increase investments	• Childcare centers, home-based and family caregivers • Funding directly to parenting students to cover care and other basic needs • Solutions to achieve quality wages for care providers and state subsidy availability for students • Alternatives to childcare centers as “one size does not fit all” for parents needs
Increase flexibility and predictability within postsecondary programs	• Design postsecondary programs with parents in mind: Scheduling aligned with childcare, remote options, flexibility for parenting roles • Reduce burdensome administrative processes – streamline intakes and reduce paperwork for resources, one intake point for multiple resources, parent-specific navigation support
Build supportive networks	• Center parenting student voices • Co-create solutions across sectors – Engage and plan supports with postsecondary institutions, community-based organizations, labor and workforce, private sector/ employers, and parenting students • Create cross-sector learning opportunities
Build community and a culture of care for parenting students	• Engage staff and faculty on needs of parenting students, their roles for supporting success, and opportunities for campus continuous improvement in understanding and addressing the needs of parenting students • Create inclusive communications to students and include visibility and knowledge of existing resources • Create “family-friendly” spaces and opportunities for parenting students peer connections and mutual support
Multi-generational approaches	• Increase collaborations that include K12, early learning systems and community-based organizations together with postsecondary systems to enhance multi-generational family success

Participants identified high-interest opportunities in the short- to mid-term

- **Create a plan to for common data collection in postsecondary** that can inform institutional, local, regional and state-level decision-making and improved support for parenting students. Use research and lessons from other states and engage multiple perspectives across sectors and engage with students on purpose and process.
- **Foster campus practices supportive of parenting student success:** Top areas of interest:
 - Assess current supportive practices to know strengths and challenge areas.
 - Learn about parenting students' childcare needs and consider campus and community partners and resources that can help address gaps.
 - Develop online resource page for parents. Explore options for a common resource page supplemented by local campus resources.
 - Develop or enhance strategies to connect parenting students to each other for mutual support. (ex. Student organizations, Pierce College App example)
 - Build sense of campus belonging through family-friendly spaces, communications, activities, etc.
- **Increase local and regional awareness of postsecondary pathways and return on investment for parenting students.** Engage in discussion with local leaders and potential partners to identify and lower barriers, and to enhance support.
- **Longer term, creating more supported pipelines for childcare credentials is essential** for workforce development.

What's Next?

Building momentum from this convening in Fall 2025 will include:

- Learning from data collection models from other states and considering strategies that could work in Washington.
- Determining how to advance campus inclusive practices and streamlined access to resources.
- Exploring policy development opportunities, led by Communities for our Colleges, Washington Student Association and Postsecondary Basic Needs Coalition.

For more information and to get involved, please contact Ami Magisos, WSAC Strategy & Partnerships, Amim@wsac.wa.gov.

Appendix A: Convening Agenda

Advancing Postsecondary Success for Parenting Students in Washington

Friday, Oct 3, 2025, 8:30 am - 2pm

Pierce College Ft. Steilacoom Campus, Cascade Building #421

Event Co-Hosts: Pierce College, Communities for our Colleges, WA Campus Childcare Coalition, Washington Student Achievement Council, WA State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

Convening Goals:

- Connect leaders who care about parenting student issues through interactive discussions
- Explore the landscape and issues faced by postsecondary parenting students in Washington
- Learn about practices, partnerships, and strategies supporting parenting students' success
- Identify opportunities and consider next steps to advance parenting student success

9:00 Welcome and Agenda

- **Connect and discuss:** Lowering barriers for parenting students

9:30 Understanding the landscape for parenting students

- Learn key facts about parenting students in WA
- **Connect and discuss:** What do people need to know about parenting students?

10:00 Local practices and partnerships supporting parenting students

- Learn from local leaders about their actions to support parenting students:
 - Pierce College - Inclusive practices: Ann Slaughter and Alex Barnes
 - The Evergreen State College - Sustainability: Casey Lalonde and Connie Brangard
 - Highline College - Connecting students to resources: Mariela Barriga
 - Machinist Institute - Childcare development: Shana Peschek
 - Chehalis Cornerstone - Community partnerships: Cecilia Jimenez and DeeDee Judd
- **Connect and discuss:** Where do you see opportunities?

11:15 Lunch and tour Pierce College's Child Development Center

12:15 Strategies to advance parenting student success

- Learn 3 strategies to support: Data collection, streamlining processes, Investment
- **Connect and discuss:** Examining strategies, exploring impact and feasibility.

1:15 Promising opportunities and next steps

- Identify common interests and next steps.

Appendix B: Participants

In building trust with our partners and community, this convening began with trusted advocates, stewarded by partners in their relationships with their communities. Over fifty people attended the convening, representing individual experiences (including 17 current postsecondary student leaders), advocacy groups, community-based organizations, institutions of higher education, workforce and labor leaders, and state agencies.

Participants included:

- Currently enrolled students at the Associates, Bachelor, and Masters degree levels from two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Washington.
- Community-based organizations and advocacy groups, with representatives from Yakima, Thurston, Seattle, and Pierce counties, whose work serves parenting learners in various capacities.
- Labor and workforce groups, including Machinists Institute, Labor & Industries, Workforce Development Council, Career Connect Washington, and SPEEA Aerospace Career Enhancement
- Staff from Community and Technical Colleges and four-year colleges and universities in Washington, including expertise from participants in early learning, student affairs and basic needs, and faculty.
- Agency staff from the Washington Student Achievement Council and State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Appendix C: Detailed discussion notes

Practices and Partnerships Opportunities

Campus inclusive practices:

- Design programs/funding with parenting students as central population
 - Keeping predictable class schedules
 - Year-round financial aid to better plan and prepare
- Have student parent voices and collaboration in planning and decision-making opportunities
- Share resources and connecting parents to peer support – Ex: Pierce College Canvas course/shell
- Understand parenting status changes (i.e., students becoming parents during college)
- Reduce paperwork to verify dependents. Trust students on their needs.
- Build a culture and physical space that is inclusive of parents and children/infants/youth.
- Connect with college foundation for specialized supports for parents and kids.
- Invite Pierce College and Evergreen State College to share with other colleges/committees about campus childcare.
- Collect stories of students.
- Train instructors and staff to understand to build courses for student success: what it's like for parenting students, their rights, and how to support.
- Student emergency assistance grants: 20% of requests were unmet child needs.
- Have liaison between student and faculty particularly around facility closures, family illness, etc.
- Strengthen support for emotional needs, specifically for guilt about not being with child and feeling shame/unworthy of help.
- On-campus care: encouraging use of services even for non-class reasons (ex. studying, grocery shopping, etc.)

Childcare Sustainability practices and opportunities:

- Ensure support and sustainability of early childhood educators
- Have stronger alignment of ECEAP eligibility and available spaces.
- Get clarity and consistency of permitting regulations in opening new centers
- Make a case for funding for campus centers: data, crafting messages to different audiences

Apprenticeships and workforce opportunities:

- Machinists Institute surveyed apprentices to understand the barriers. They are opening a childcare center that specifically served non-standard hours.
- Intentionally invest in childcare for the workforce
- Create flexible time solutions
- Provide flexible funding to parents – ex – cash vouchers
- Expand or establish networks to support parents and childcare providers
- Tap into workforce resources: BFET, Opportunity Grant, Early Achievers, resources for displaced homemakers, under-employed, need in decline and in demand

Community partnerships supporting parenting students:

- Build narrative to help drive policy and program shifts – including storytelling on innovative partnerships like Chehalis Cornerstone.
- Dual Generation approaches: How can we scale these at state level? Create multi-sector emphasis, multi-partner, holistic. These equate to outcomes and economic vitality.
- Leverage multi-sector supports and relationships in these challenging times to co-create solutions. Business and industry must be at the table to co-create supports – they need housing and childcare for workforce. Partnerships can equate to funding, policy, and program impacts.
- Keep subsidy spots open in childcare – spots are currently limited for those with subsidies.
- Childcare must pay quality wages.

Focused strategies discussion

1. Make parents visible through common data collection

- Data can help us make the case for larger investments in the future
 - a. Use data collected in 2026-2027 to support legislative action in 2027. Elected officials are interested in this data.
- Surveying to capture information:
 - a. Points of collection: Enrollment/admissions form, course registration
 - b. Consider collecting needs as well as status.
 - c. Consider definitions and capturing “Caring for kids” – that’s not just parents
 - d. Explain the **Why** of collecting data.
 - i. Importance of communicating the process with students. Consider incentives.
 - ii. In developing survey, need feedback from participants. Ex- Pierce College invited feedback as a class project.
 - e. Data privacy needs to be considered. Where will the data be housed?
 - f. On-going status assessment needed – if status changes
- Impact?
 - a. This would provide tangible evidence on numbers and specific needs.
 - b. Make the case for funding and impact on local economic development.
 - c. This data could be opportunity for college to follow up with individual support and connection and/or easy-to-access resource information
 - d. Priority registration for parenting status would be option.
- Considerations:
 - a. How can data collection be streamlined?
 - b. Data collection can feel threatening to institutions
 - c. Students may have trust issues in providing information.
 - d. What additional data can be tapped on parenting students? What can we compile already to see trends?
 - e. Is there a way to consider data and needs of **potential** students who are parents – not just current students?

2. Streamlining / Reducing Burden

- Streamlining should mean less paperwork, more assistance, more trust, systems talking with each other, and eligibility granted across multiple programs.
- Integrated internal systems and intake:
 - Single universal intake for multiple or all programs.
 - Create better questions with plain language, translation as needed, and simpler steps.
 - Digital literacy may impact both application completion and accessibility
 - Streamline applications, review and disbursement
 - Do we need “receipts” and “proof” for support? How to streamline to reduce burden?
- Considerations:
 - Multiple departments would need to work together: basic needs, financial services, enrollment services.
 - There would have to be clear priority among leaders – inertia can be a barrier.
- Communicating the resources:
 - Equip the departments that students trust/are popular to share resources
 - Train staff, work study students to communicate (ex. libraries)
 - Inter-department communication centers – it’s confusing when departments share different information or urgency levels. Have communication standards.
 - Social media as a tool to share resources
 - Use orientation to share resources

3. Invest in parenting students

- Flexible funding to parents.
- Importance of funding for childcare providers – staff, centers, home-based, etc – and funding strong workforce pathways for early childhood to sustain the system.
- More investment requires more data to make the case.

4. Additional strategy ideas

- How can colleges better connect parenting students with each other?
 - Example: Pierce College is exploring an app to connect parenting students for mutual care support. Includes screening of individuals.
 - Intentional structures for mutual aid: Best outcome for parenting students occur when those with resources can support other parents who are in need of support. Connecting higher resourced with under-resourced creates sharing opportunities that reduce burdens or create new opportunities
- Consider different kinds of needs of dependents – may include non-children dependents.