

Develop a comprehensive website that provides a lengthy guide for college students who are parents of dependent children and create a campus parent-ally network.

CURRENT CHALLENGE:

Current data indicates that 26% of college students are parents of dependent children; numbers are even higher when looking more closely at students of color. When we as an institution discuss the diversity of our students and their diverse needs, rarely are student parents represented in our discussions of student success.

Faculty across campus can attest to the challenges their students face during pregnancy and later as they struggle to negotiate the demands of their children and their classes. Few faculty are familiar with the Title IX rights for pregnant and nursing mothers, and even fewer include language in their syllabi or take time during class to address resources and class policies that would be of interest to students with dependents. As my McNair mentee's research on experiences of Latina mothers at Fresno State reveals, students not only do not have a central place to go for resources, but also feel marginalized and find it difficult to identify with their peers who are not parents. These feelings can compound their academic struggles, making them particularly vulnerable to dropping out. From lack of a central place for student parents to consult with to not feeling like they are part of their campus community, students with dependents at Fresno State are long overdue for attention.

PROPOSED SOLUTION:

My solution is two-fold:

1. Though I boldly envision a central office with resources, advising, mentorship, and an area for community-building, because of the limitations of this challenge, I propose a comprehensive website, similar to UCLA's Students with Dependents website, which provides a lengthy guide that features information for parents about transportation, schools, pediatricians, events, support groups, employment, scholarships for parents, etc. This website would have information for on- and off-campus resources for students; it will provide stories of student parent success, and it will also clearly state their Title IX rights. Additionally, it will be a resource for faculty who would like to better support their student parents and who need language for their syllabi about policies concerning student parents.
2. Create a campus parent-ally network. Similar to the LGBTQ allies, parent allies can receive training on how to support students with dependents at Fresno State.

BENEFITS TO FRESNO STATE:

My solutions will potentially benefit a quarter of our students by providing them a place to easily access resources and to find answers to common questions about navigating the university as a parent.

The ideas proposed have the potential to benefit students who are caregivers of parents or siblings, who experience similar demands as parents. The parent ally network will put these students into contact with a community of support, which will strengthen the overall unity of the university.

My solution will also benefit faculty who may feel unprepared to address the needs of their students who are pregnant or nursing, or who are caretakers.

Importantly, my solution will give visibility to a particularly vulnerable student demographic; this visibility, I hope, will transform our approaches to improving student success.

ADDINTIONAL INFORMATION: