



January 23, 2026

Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee

Senate Hearing Rm 2 and Virtual

J.A. Cherberg

Olympia, WA

Subject: Testimony In Support of Senate Bill SB 6227 Parenting Student Data

Dear Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development Committee,

New America is a federal policy think tank based in Washington, D.C. and we write in support of SB 6227 which aims to improve Washington's student parent data collection. New America's higher education program is a team of researchers and advocates who are dedicated to making higher education more equitable and accountable so that every student has the chance to obtain an affordable, high-quality education.

Student parents are a significant presence on campuses, making up about 1 in 5 undergraduates and 1 in 4 graduate students.¹ The majority of parenting students are female, people of color, and on average older than the traditional college student.² In Washington, this is an estimated 54,600 undergraduate degree-seeking students and 26,000 graduate students; but we do not know at which institutions or programs parenting students are enrolled and lack institution or state-level data on their persistence and graduation.³ This significantly limits colleges and state lawmakers in supporting retention and graduation for parenting students, who represent significant workforce potential.

Ultimately, a lack of actionable data on parenting students to inform policy and support for these students jeopardizes state and federal investments in higher education and the workforce. It also puts students at risk of investing money, time, and energy into a postsecondary program that doesn't pay off, or worse, leaves them with student loan debt and depleted financial resources but without improved job prospects and financial security. In order to better support parenting students and protect state and federal investments in higher education, we need better data which is why bills like SB 6227 are vital.

¹ Anderson, Theresa, et al. 2024. *Who Are Undergraduates with Dependent Children? An Updated Overview of Student-Parent Characteristics Using 2020 Data.* n.p.: Student-Parent Action through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative.

² Ibid.

³ From authors' analysis of 2023 American Community Survey data. While ACS data gives an estimate of parenting students, the data does not include 1) nondegree seeking students, 2) students who parent a child that lives in another household, 3) students who are working toward a degree but had not been enrolled in classes within the prior 3 months of completing the ACS survey. It is therefore an undercount of parenting students in the state.

Existing research on the parenting student population relies heavily on the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), a survey that provides data insights to higher education researchers and policymakers but is limited in its utility for state-level analyses. This data collection effort is housed within the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education, which has experienced a federal reduction in force over the past year and tumultuous moving of programs to other federal agencies. Serious questions have been raised regarding how NCES will continue to collect higher education data and make it available to researchers and policymakers.⁴ It is more important than ever that states consider how to collect robust data so that they are able to identify trends in higher education and are equipped with accurate information to make decisions that support state attainment goals and workforce development.

While all students are required to pay for tuition and living expenses, parenting comes with additional costs such as child care and the current financial aid system is not designed to allot for this cost. The first step to improving this is ensuring that Washington colleges have a proper accounting of how many parenting students are enrolled, how old their children are, and what kinds of support they need.

Ultimately, the different responsibilities that parenting students have create unique challenges which unfortunately means that parenting students experience delays in their higher education attainment. But it does not have to remain this way for parenting students in Washington.

Without comprehensive data collection on this vital student population, state and institutional leaders struggle to truly understand parenting student experiences. Better data collection can help Washington institutions dismantle the barriers hindering parenting students' success. We encourage the committee to support and pass SB 6227. Our team is also available for follow up questions and happy to provide additional research or resources on student parents in higher education. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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⁴ Blake, Jessica, "Under McMahon, ED Is Diminished but Not Dead, Experts Say," Inside HigherEd, 2025, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/government/politics-elections/2025/11/03/under-mcmahon-ed-diminished-not-dead-experts-say>