



Student Parent Support Initiative Report Program Year One

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About the Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding more than \$224 million annually in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

About This Report

This is a legislative-mandated report. As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197, this report cost approximately \$1,193.52 to prepare, including staff time.

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Student Parent Support Initiative

The 2023 Minnesota Legislature funded the Student Parent Support Initiative (SPSI), to establish a competitive grant program administered by the Office of Higher Education (OHE), in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), to support entities and institutions that assist pregnant and parenting students enrolled at institutions of higher education. The SPSI will provide grants of \$100,000 to \$350,000, based on need, to public or accredited private postsecondary institutions serving low-income students. Generally, permitted uses include services for persons, especially students, who are pregnant or are the parent of a dependent child. The funds are to be used for program or service development (including creation or expansion of dedicated space, staff, and data collection); and yearly maintenance and capacity building of individual institutional programs.

This report fulfills the required mandate for a progress report to the Legislature. By August 1, 2023, the Office of Higher Education shall report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education on activities occurring. The report must include but is not limited to, information about students served, the organizations providing services, program activities, program goals, and outcomes. The full text of the legislation is included in Appendix A.

Background

The Minnesota Student Parent Support Initiative addresses the health and educational needs of expectant and parenting students across Minnesota. Current and prospective college students are at high risk for unintended pregnancies, unhealthy behaviors during pregnancy, and are at a crucial time in their lives for building their future through postsecondary education.

Student parents face multiple barriers to college enrollment, persistence, and completion. These barriers include but are not limited to constraints with time and money, lack of child care resources and academic support, or diminished motivation as they are more likely to return to college after an extended absence and feel excluded from traditional campus support services. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, re-enrollment rates of students with children dropped dramatically, likely due to health concerns, job and income losses, and the challenges of remote learning for their children and themselves. Additionally, for students who reported having dependents on their FAFSA, admissions applications are down 13% over previous years¹.

Higher education has a direct correlation to future earning potential. Research shows that unintended pregnancies are associated with decreased lifetime education and income. Women in Minnesota reporting an unintended pregnancy were less likely to report "some college" or "college or more" (Reichlin Cruse, et al., 2021).

¹ Data retrieved by Minnesota Office of Higher Education on August 11, 2021

By supporting parenting students during college, Minnesota invests in greater economic stability not only for these students and their families, but for the state as a whole, through their participation in the workforce, increased income taxes, and savings in public assistance programs. Research indicates that access to intensive case management services, increased financial support, and access to high-quality, convenient childcare can increase student parent's ability to successfully complete their higher education credential (Reichlin Cruse, et al., 2021).

By providing critical supports to pregnant and parenting students, Minnesota is able to take a two-generation approach to reducing poverty and improving life outcomes for children and their families. Through programs funded by the SPSI families will have increased access to crucial resources and services within their community, overall ensuring that children have a healthy start and families have access to affordable and quality child care and early education; access to mental health and other health supports; and basic needs support. By helping stabilize their needs in college, this program sets the foundation for future success for student parents as well as their child(ren).

Previous Work

In 2021, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, in partnership with nonprofit organization Raise The Barr, received a \$150,000 grant from Ascend at the Aspen Institute, as part of their Policy Acceleration Partnership program. With those funds, OHE created the Student Parent and Whole Family Coordinator position, which is focused on elevating the needs of student parents and their families and coordinating the state's efforts to better understand and support those needs, utilizing a whole family, or two generation approach. The coordinator was tasked with planning, research, and development for student parent initiatives on college campuses across the state. Additionally, the coordinator engaged in purposeful collaboration and coalition building with nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and other stakeholders, including student parents, to work toward a shared vision of success for student parents and their families.

While participating in the Policy Acceleration Partnership program at Ascend, OHE was able to engage in meaningful collaborations and exploratory work around student parents in Minnesota. For instance, OHE now leads the Minnesota Student Parent Alliance (MN SPA), a collaborative working group, along with partner agencies Raise the Barr, the Minnesota State System of Colleges and Universities (Minn State), the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Department of Health, student organization Lead MN, and the Governor's Children's Cabinet. MN SPA meets regularly to discuss, share resources, and collaborate on student parent issues. MN SPA hosted three online convenings in fall 2022 to raise awareness about student parents, increase understanding about the current environment surrounding student parents and their children, and learn ways to advocate for change at the campus, local, and state levels to increase resources for student parents and their children in Minnesota.

Several short-term goals and outcomes were achieved during the grant period, while the foundation for ongoing work toward long-term goals and outcomes was established:

- OHE hired a full-time Student Parent and Whole Family Coordinator and the position was maintained through the Student Parent Support Initiative portion of the One Minnesota Budget that was approved by the 2023 Minnesota legislature.
- Three convenings were held in September, October, and November of 2022, with over 100 students and professionals registering to attend. Attendance ranged from 38 to 60 participants at each convening with 7 to 11 student parents participating across all convenings.
- Coalitions with partner agencies have been strengthened and expanded; initially, there were five state-level agencies in MN SPA. Now, the collaborative group includes eight different agencies, including a student advocacy group and both state-wide higher education institutions. Monthly MN SPA meetings began in March, 2022 and continued through November, 2022 with plans to continue meeting regularly in 2023.
- Student parent initiatives were identified through several different engagement techniques with student parents, including one-on-one interviews, participation in group breakouts, testifying before the state legislature, and participation in discussion panels.

These initiatives included:

- The need for accurate and consistent data collection about the parenting student population in Minnesota;
- The need for consistent funding at the institutional level to support student parent needs on campus;
- The need for targeted communication from institutions to student parents about available resources and supports.

The above-mentioned student parent initiatives informed OHE's decision to move forward with two proposals, with the support of agency leadership. The first proposal would develop a comprehensive basic needs and student parent data collection program in partnership with the Minn State, as part of the Massachusetts Basic Needs Security Technical Assistance Program. OHE's application was accepted and initial conversations about establishing a broad data collection program are currently underway. The other proposal went before the 2023 Minnesota state legislature as a request to fund the Student Parent Support Initiative, which received statutory approval for \$3,000,000 annually and was signed into law as part of the One Minnesota Budget.

Student Parents in Minnesota

Currently, available data on the student parent population in Minnesota is sparse and inconsistently collected. The estimates presented here are based on data from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and institutional applications for various types of state financial aid programs. It should be noted that currently there is no comprehensive, ongoing, state level data collection method that includes both a student's enrollment status and parental status. Institutions of higher education that participate in the Student Parent Support Initiative will be required to offer students the opportunity to self-identify as a parent when reporting other demographic information on an annual basis, so we will likely gain better insight when those data become available.

Parenting students face a multitude of unique difficulties when pursuing a postsecondary credential, ranging from financial and time constraints, to successfully navigating the college landscape, to ensuring their child is well cared for while they attend classes and work. Once launched, this initiative can ease some of these issues, so parenting students can more readily persist and complete their higher education goals and go on to earn family sustaining wages. Student parents are highly motivated; they typically have higher GPAs than their non-parenting peers and are eager to join the workforce to support their families (Reichlin Cruse, et al., 2019).

Despite this, we know that parenting students manage difficult realities on a daily basis:

- Student parents in MN are more likely to be women, unmarried, enrolled part-time, and low-income (Whelan, 2020).
- We also know that of the MN students who received SNAP benefits between Sept-Dec 2021, 39% reported having a child at home.²
- Additionally, in the 2019-2020 academic year, over 50% of unmarried student parents who received a MN State Grant had annual incomes under \$20,000, considerably fewer financial resources than their non-parenting peers (Whelan, 2021).
- National research finds that while single mothers who earn college degrees experience significant benefits for themselves and their families, they are also some of the least likely students to complete their degree:
 - Nationally, only 8% of single mother undergraduates complete an associate or bachelor's degree within six years of their initial enrollment, compared to nearly half of women in college who are not mothers (Reichlin Cruse, et al., 2021).

Given the constraints parenting students manage while attempting to complete their higher education goals, the services and support offered by the SPSI can help mitigate these challenges and retain student parents when the everyday challenges of leading a family become overwhelming.

² Data provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Resources on March 3, 2022

Organizations Providing Services

Once the SPSI programming is fully launched and grants awarded, a full description of the various institutions of higher education and organizations that are providing direct student parent support will be provided. The types of organizations that are eligible to apply for these funds include postsecondary institutions, professional organizations, community-based organizations, or other applicants deemed appropriate by the Commissioner.

Program Activities

Current Efforts

Foundational work for the Student Parent Support Initiative is underway within both the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) and the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). An Interagency Agreement that outlines roles and responsibilities for each department is in progress. Lead staff for the program within OHE have been identified and the process to hire a Nurse Practitioner with MDH has been initiated. Also, a program budget has been created, a workplan timeline is in development, and a Request for Proposals (RFP) is being drafted.

Future Program Activities

Preparatory efforts are underway to launch the Student Parent Support Initiative program in spring 2024. An RFP is in progress and will be finalized in fall 2023, at which time a formal review panel, scoring rubric, and selection process will be established to review submissions. Institutions of higher education will be notified about the funding opportunity in fall 2023; they will have up to 60 days to submit their program proposals for review and consideration. During that application window, OHE will host an informational meeting to review the RFP and application process, as well as answer questions about the SPSI priorities. The review panel will evaluate each proposal and determine which applicants will receive the awards. The selected institutions will be notified before the end of the calendar year 2023 and funds are expected to be distributed in January of 2024. Throughout spring 2024, training sessions for participating institution staff will be held to share program goals and expectations, to provide training around health screening, navigation and case management best practices, and to resource sharing. Direct supportive services are expected to begin at varying times in 2024, as each participating institution hires necessary staff and completes the initial phases of launching the program within their campus community.

Program Goals & Outcomes

This program aims to increase student parent retention and completion rates, while improving our understanding of student parent population, using several strategies:

- Providing direct, one-on-one case management services to navigate the college landscape;
- Increasing access to safe, reliable childcare;
- Providing easy access to health services for themselves and their child(ren);
- Providing emergency grants and referral services for basic needs support;
- Creating a culture of belonging for parenting students and their families on campus;
- Collecting data about the student parent population in Minnesota;
- Encouraging a whole-family approach to providing student support services.

There are several short-term goals and long-term outcomes for the Student Parent Support Initiative. OHE and MDH will work in partnership to determine how progress toward these goals are to be measured and data collected.

Short-term goals include:

- Increased the number of institutions of higher education that provide specialized services for expectant and parenting students;
- Expectant and parenting students at grantee institutions have access to individualized support services;
- Expectant and parenting students at grantee institutions have access to health and well-being services and resources for themselves and their children;
- Increased ability to collect data about expectant and parenting students and their families;

Long-term outcomes include:

- Increase college admission and attainment rates for student parents;
- Increase access to quality education and training programs for student parents;
- Improve educational outcomes for children of student parents;
- Student parents feel recognized and a sense of belonging on campus and at MN SPA partner organizations, as reported via semester surveys;
- MN SPA partners have filled gaps and reduced duplication of efforts/referring each other;
- MN SPA partners have purposeful approaches and programs to working with student parents.

By providing substantial, effective supportive services for student parents, there is the possibility that parents who do not currently have a higher education credential may see college as a more feasible option. There are a large number of families who could benefit from these supportive services, if they were to attend college in the future. According to the 2015-2019 American Community Survey Census, there are about 39,000 single parents over the age of 25 who have some college credit, but no degree, and there are an additional 30,000 single parents over the age of 25 who completed high school or a GED but have not pursued a higher education

credential (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2022). Through continued partnership among MN SPA members to launch the Student Parent Support Initiative, as well as staff training and support around whole-family approaches to student services, we anticipate progress toward long-term outcomes that can improve the lives of student parents and their families, and may encourage those without degrees to enroll.

Appendix A: Legislation for Student Parent Support Initiative

Minnesota Session Laws – 2023, Regular Session

CHAPTER 41--H.F.No. 2073

ARTICLE 1. APPROPRIATIONS

Sec. 2 Minnesota Office of Higher Education

Subd. 38 Student Parent Support Initiative 2024 - \$3,000,000 2025 - \$3,000,000

ARTICLE 2. HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISIONS

Sec. 16. STUDENT PARENT SUPPORT INITIATIVE.

Subdivision 1. Grants.

(a) To address the needs and support the educational goals of expectant and parenting college students across Minnesota, the commissioner shall award grants and provide support services to institutions and partnering entities that assist expectant parents and parents or legal guardians of young children. Grants shall be awarded to postsecondary institutions, professional organizations, community-based organizations, or other applicants deemed appropriate by the commissioner. Grants must be used to offer services to support the academic goals, health, and well-being of student parents. Services and costs eligible for grant funding include but are not limited to:

- (1) program development costs;
- (2) costs related to the start-up of on-campus child care;
- (3) evaluation and data collection; and
- (4) direct assistance to student parents including:
 - (i) scholarships;
 - (ii) basic needs support; and
 - (iii) expenses related to child care.

(b) Postsecondary institutions may act as the fiscal agents in partnership with a local nongovernmental agency, child care center, or other organization that serves student parents.

Subd. 2. Application process. The commissioner shall develop a grant application process. The commissioner shall support projects in a manner that attempts to ensure eligible students throughout the state have access to program services.

Subd. 3. Postsecondary institution reporting. Each postsecondary institution shall allow students to identify whether the student is a parent, a legal guardian, acting as a parent, or an expectant parent on an annual basis on a form used to collect demographic data from students. The postsecondary institution shall provide the information to the commissioner annually on a date and in a manner prescribed by the commissioner.

Subd. 4. Health-related supports. The commissioner, in partnership with the Department of Health, shall provide health-related supports. Activities for health-related supports include:

- (1) ensuring programs, services, and materials are medically accurate, age appropriate, culturally and linguistically appropriate, and inclusive of all populations;
- (2) working with community health care providers and other service support organizations that serve the target population for this program; and
- (3) providing technical assistance and training for institutional parent support center staff on how to conduct screenings and referrals for the health concerns of student parents, including alcohol misuse, substance use disorders, depression, anxiety, intimate partner violence, tobacco and nicotine, and other health concerns.

Subd. 5. Report and evaluation. By August 1 of each odd-numbered year, the commissioner shall submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over higher education finance regarding the grant recipients and their activities. The report shall include information about the students served, the organizations providing services, program activities, program goals, and outcomes.

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