

Making Student Parents Visible: Collecting Parenting Status Data in NM Higher Education

New Mexico has taken bold steps in recent years to reimagine education across the lifespan as a true public good. From universal childcare and historic investments in early childhood and pre-K-12, to strengthened adult education and family literacy, to tuition-free college, NM has centered education access as a core strategy for community wellbeing. Within this landscape, parenting students represent a key opportunity to further advance cradle to career learning. Establishing a consistent approach to identifying and understanding this student group will equip NM with the insights needed to better support their retention, completion, and long-term success.

What do we know about student parents in New Mexico?

In a 2024 survey at nine NM colleges and universities **33%** of students were parents of children under age 18.¹ Student parents were more likely than non-parenting students to be:

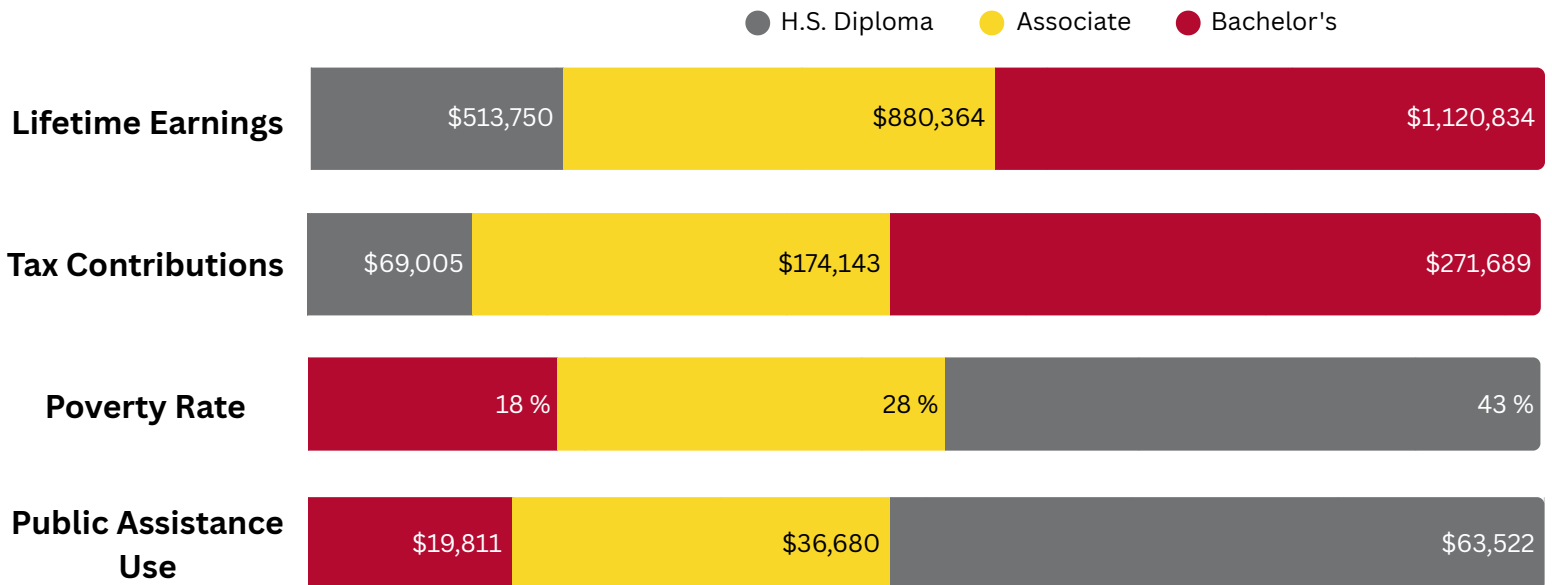
62% First generation college students

54% Food insecure

47% Unable to pay essential expenses

Return on Investment

NM single mothers who earn college degrees experience significant increases in lifetime earnings and reduction in poverty rates. They also contribute more in NM taxes and use fewer NM public assistance dollars.²



Multigenerational Impact

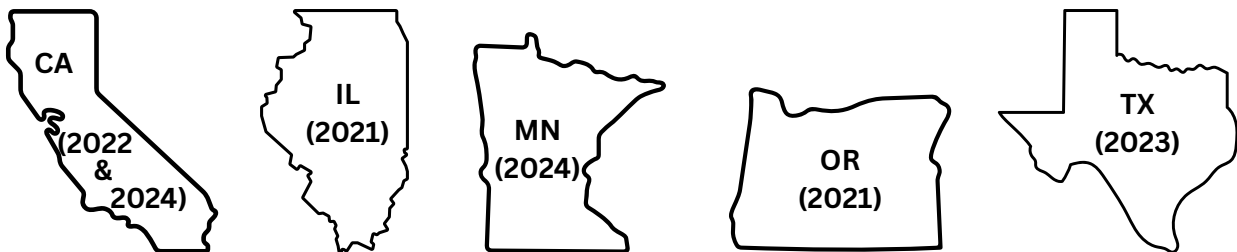
- Adults with a college-educated parent are nearly **3x** as likely to complete college themselves and have incomes **36%** higher than first generation graduates. Supporting the success of today's parenting students will also lead to higher college completion rates and wealth for the next generation of New Mexicans.³
- Children growing up in higher-income households have a lower risk of developmental delays and poor school achievement than their lower-income peers.⁴

Need for data

52% of student parents nationally leave college without a degree.⁵

- Currently, few NM colleges and universities comprehensively identify parenting students and the state has no mechanism for collecting or aggregating this data.
- Without this data, there is not a systematic way to identify, assess the needs of, and provide targeted support to parenting students, including connecting them to other state resources like WIC, SNAP, and Child Care Assistance.
- Colleges and universities can use this data to target student services; open, expand, or target outreach for campus child care; create family-friendly campuses; and support student basic needs in order to **increase student retention and completion rates**.

Since 2021, 5 states have passed legislation mandating assessment of parental status



1. <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/survey-parenting-students-new-mexico>

2. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/New-Mexico.pdf>

3. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2021/05/18/first-generation-college-graduates-lag-behind-their-peers-on-key-economic-outcomes/>

4. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3083977/>

5. <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Busy-With-Purpose-v2b.pdf>