



*Higher Education
Campus Guide:*

BUILDING STUDENT PARENT LEADERSHIP AND VOICE

Authors: Miniya Hinson, Rachel Kutcher, Jenelle Lovelette, Ava Molby,
Brenda Pinedo Macedo, Jackie Rodriguez, Etagu Wondimu



One of higher education's roles is to shape the leadership skills of our students, many of whom will become future leaders in their respective fields. At the same time, students with lived experience, such as parenting while in school, bring unique knowledge and perspectives that are critical to ensure our institutions are appropriately supporting their academic success. Opportunities to promote student parent leadership and voice abound on college campuses - this guide offers a few leadership approaches, guided by experiences at Santa Fe Community College.

Student parents co-authored this guide. Sometimes they are directly quoted to emphasize their first-person narrative, while in other instances their contributions are included in the third person and integrated with staff input. In both cases, their perspectives and recommendations form the core of this guide.



ADVISORY GROUP/ STUDENT PARENT ALLIANCE



A student parent advisory group or alliance can be connected to a specific program at the college or students can self-organize the group as a club. In colleges/universities with a lot of student clubs and on-campus classes and engagement, students may be most interested in a student-organized and student-led club.

At SFCC, our Student Parent Alliance is organized by our Student Parent Success Program. It serves as an advisory group for the program and also helps organize and lead activities and events.

1. See Appendix D for more detailed examples.

We've engaged student parents in activities such as¹:



Providing feedback on our program's services, curricula, website resources, and co-writing campus guides (like this one!)



Co-designing new programs and resources for parenting students



Organizing and helping to staff parent and family events and activities



Tabling at broader campus and community events to let other students know about resources available to them



Creating social media posts and videos



Participating in student parent panels and presentations (see the next section for more on this)

BENEFITS

Sense of Belonging and Peer Support

SFCC Student Parent Alliance members agree that they were motivated to join and continue participating in the alliance because they **desire a sense of community with other parenting students:**

"There's something grounding about seeing familiar faces in class or on campus and feeling part of a larger, supportive community. That sense of shared purpose and mutual understanding helped me feel less isolated and more empowered." – Ava



Students see their peers in the alliance and the staff members supporting the alliance as a **resource for their academic success:**

"For me, being part of the alliance was especially meaningful as an international student unfamiliar with the college system, which can be a big barrier to starting a certification or an associate degree. The alliance provides personalized support and the resources you need, is empathetic, and celebrates your achievements. This community motivates me and gives me confidence to reach my academic goals regardless of age or parental role." – Brenda

"It has given me the opportunity to connect with other student parents, share our challenges, and work together to create a more supportive and inclusive environment on campus." – Jackie

"I was feeling really lonely as a parent, so having that connection helps with our mental health as students and parents. It's hard to make time for yourself and for friends when you are a student and a parent. When we have meetings and when we staff events, we are also socializing." – Miniya





Collaboration and Leading the Way for Other Student Parents

Members also highlighted how participating in the Student Parent Alliance has **helped their skills in collaboration and teamwork grow**.

"I've learned teamwork and how to work with and collaborate with other people. I had to be flexible about meeting at times that worked for other people, extend compassion to them, network, and connect through team building."

– Miniya

Alliance members take pride in **leading the way for future student parents**:

"I had the opportunity to help facilitate College Ready sessions², including leading campus tours of Santa Fe Community College. It was especially meaningful to speak with potential students about how family-friendly the campus has become. While giving these tours, I also learned a great deal about the many resources available to both students and student parents." – Jackie

I wanted to make education accessible to other student parents. Once I found out about all the resources available to me, I felt every parent should know about these resources and also go to school if they want to." – Jenelle

Advocacy and Policy Change

Alliance members feel it's important for them to **advocate for their needs** and the needs of other student parents on campus, and to **influence changes on campus**.

"Through this group, I have been able to contribute to efforts that make SFCC more family-friendly, such as advocating for child-friendly spaces and resources that better serve parenting students."

"It has been empowering to have a voice in these changes and to help build a campus community where student parents feel seen, supported and valued." – Jackie

Student parent leaders are also looking beyond their individual campuses, to envision policy change:

"Now, more than ever, there is recognition of nontraditional students and their prevalence in higher education. This is the time for us to start letting legislators know that we, student parents, are here and that there is no plan on us quitting. With more and more access to education, and understanding of what nontraditional students actually need, the more opportunities can arise for student parents." – Jenelle

2. See Appendix D for an explanation of College Ready.

A Sense of Belonging

Sense of belonging is a crucial contributor to college student academic success, retention, and mental wellbeing³. One study found four factors contribute to student sense of belonging: identification with the university, social match, social acceptance and cultural capital in higher education⁴. Student parents are at higher risk for feeling isolated on college campuses, especially if they don't know other student parents or feel that campus services and events are not designed with their family in mind. The connections they make with other student parents in the SFCC Student Parent Alliance increase their sense that they are part of a campus community in which staff and peers understand and share their experience.

The SFCC Student Parent Alliance also appears to increase cultural capital as students receive support from staff and their peers to navigate the institution, learn about college resources as they participate in alliance activities, and help demystify the institution for other parents. Additionally, by advocating for improvements for student parents, seeing changes made as a result of their recommendations, being welcomed as speakers and panelists in college convenings, and highlighting their stories as student parents at the college, the SFCC Student Parent Alliance can increase their identification with the institution.

CHALLENGES

- One of the biggest challenges student parents experience is balancing commitments to the Student Parent Alliance with work and parenting responsibilities. Sometimes it's hard to find a common time when everyone can meet. Sometimes they noted they wanted to help more at an event, but their children also needed their attention.
- Student parents have also said that it can be challenging to stay motivated as an advocate when there is low participation in events. Since the pandemic, we have seen a drop in participation of students at on-campus activities. Student parents helping organize events have said there is so much work that goes into event planning, so when participation is low, it can be discouraging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Tap into staff and faculty across the college to get the word out about student parent resources and leadership opportunities.
2. Create more informal opportunities for student parent leaders to connect beyond monthly alliance meetings to further build their sense of community, belonging, and commitment to the alliance.
3. Feature alliance members on social media and in other outreach efforts. Highlight diverse backgrounds such as cultures, languages, ages, family structures, fields of study, and genders.

3. Institute for Education Policy (2024, August). *How student experience and belonging interventions can support strong postsecondary outcomes*. <https://www.ihep.org/publication/student-experience-and-belonging-strong-outcomes/>

4. Mowreader, A. (2024, February 19). *What helps students feel like they belong? Inside Higher Ed*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/college-experience/2024/02/19/study-evaluates-four-factors-college-student>

“Seeing someone who shares similar experiences or identities can make other student parents feel more seen and welcomed. It helps reduce the sense of “otherness” and builds a bridge between them and the alliance by showing that there’s already someone like them in the group.” - Brenda

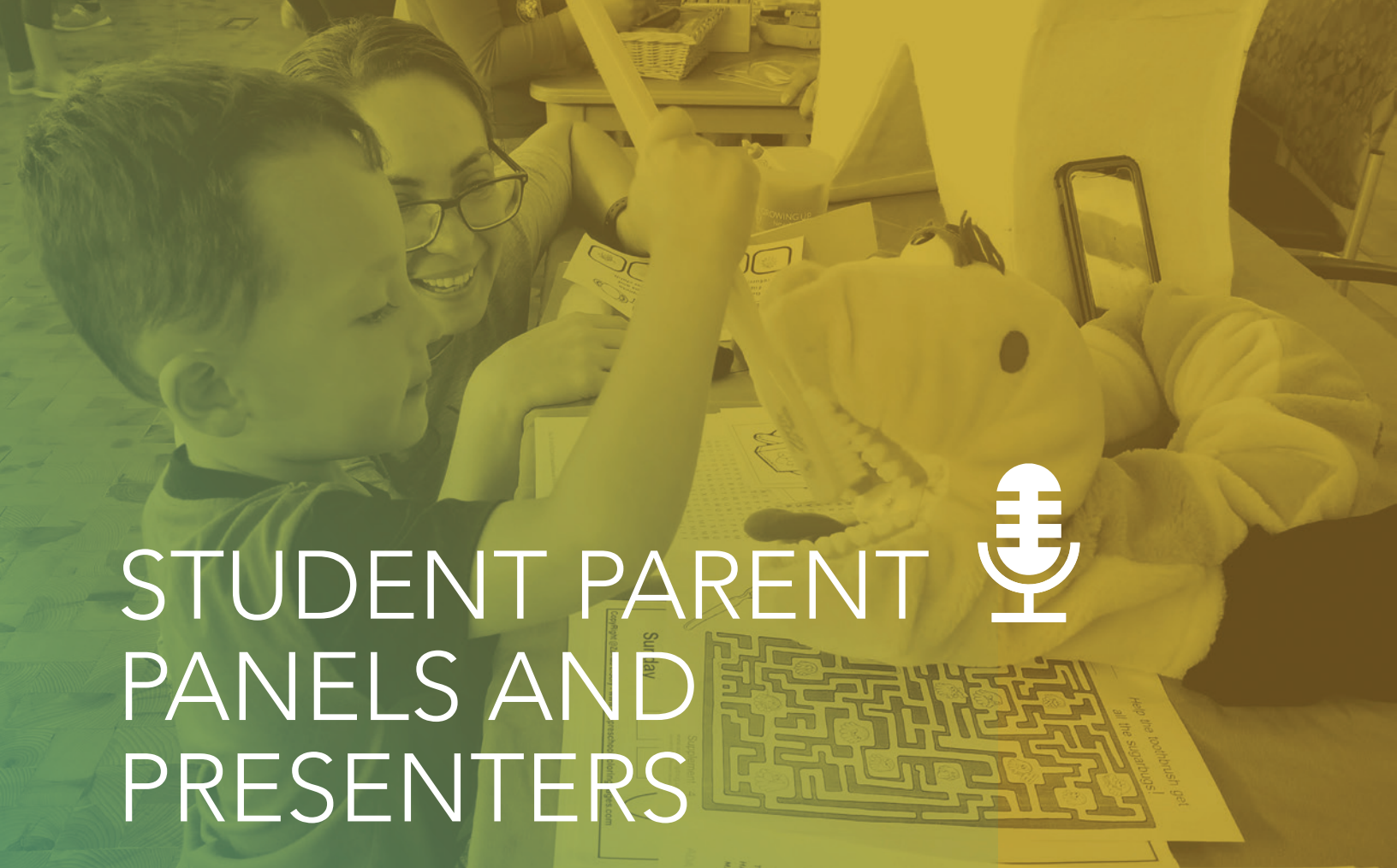
4. Even as student parent leaders are advocating for and helping other student parents, provide them with ongoing support as challenges arise as a student and a parent.
5. Provide opportunities for student parent leaders to connect with their peers at other colleges and universities and learn from each other.
6. Provide flexibility in opportunities to engage with the group, including online and in-person opportunities.
7. Provide opportunities to build students’ facilitation skills. For example, we begin each meeting with an icebreaker/check-in question and students rotate leading this question. As students participate in the alliance longer-term, we have also supported student and staff co-facilitators, who plan the agenda together in advance of the meeting and split facilitation.
8. For a program/staff-facilitated alliance, provide structure around specific projects in which you welcome students’ input and co-design. When possible, structure these projects within the bounds of a semester, or divide the project into semesterly components so that as students’ enrollment and engagement change by semester, they can still feel they’ve made a specific contribution within the semester.
9. When inviting student parents into meetings with a group of staff or faculty, create specific opportunities to engage them. Give them information about the meeting or discussion topics in advance, and specifically ask their input throughout the meeting.
10. Recognize student parent leaders publicly. Highlight their work in social media or other publicity. Provide small perks like t-shirts or other college gear.
11. Coach student parents about how to include their engagement in the advisory group or alliance on their resumes.
12. For in-person meetings, provide food and child care.

COMPENSATION

At SFCC we initially tried providing a semesterly stipend for the Student Parent Alliance, but found that an hourly stipend provided more flexibility for members to participate in different activities and with different frequencies. Currently members submit their timesheets once per month and receive a monthly stipend payment.

At SFCC it was important to the institution that the hourly stipend rate be aligned with both the work study student wage and the hourly rate for our student ambassadors program for equitable compensation. While alliance stipends are currently grant-funded and separate from these programs, alignment with these models could facilitate future funding through these models. Consider which funding sources or positions are most strategic to align with at your institution.

See Appendix C for some key questions to consider when creating a student parent alliance at your college or university.



STUDENT PARENT PANELS AND PRESENTERS



If you're hosting visits from officials such as state or national leaders, accreditation bodies, or funders, consider incorporating a student panel that includes student parents.



If you are considering how to better support student parents at your institution, or trying to educate staff and faculty on the student parent experience, organize a student parent-specific panel to hear experiences and recommendations directly from the source.



Include student parents as speakers anytime you are presenting at a conference or internal institution meetings.

Student parent speakers can collaborate with staff to present institutional accomplishments and data, but they also bring an element that staff cannot. Student parents bring quantitative data to life through their personal stories, by speaking to what has most supported them as student parents and where more resources are needed. They speak to the challenges that student parents face, as well as the motivation and strengths that will inspire your audience and galvanize them to make the changes that student parents recommend. Long after your visitors or internal leaders and team members have forgotten the specific data points you shared, they will reference the student story that resonated with them and leads them to think about serving student parents differently.

BENEFITS

The experience of speaking to people in positions of power and being heard reinforces for student parents that they do have power and influence and motivates them to continue raising their voice.

Student parents also see these speaking opportunities as a way to thank and give back to the programs or institution that has supported them. They appreciate feeling needed and advocating for the resources that helped them so that other students can receive those resources too.

“Being able to share my journey as a student parent gave me the opportunity to highlight both the challenges and the support systems that have shaped my path. It was especially impactful to speak about how SFCC has guided me in balancing academic responsibilities with parenting, offering resources and a community that truly understands the unique needs of student parents. These experiences reminded me how important it is to elevate our voices in shaping policy and campus culture.” - Jackie



Student parents gain public speaking skills that are helpful for their careers and are something they can include on a resume. In particular, students noted they learned to be succinct, to focus on a main point, and when speaking on a panel, to pay attention to others’ responses and add to them rather than repeating the same point. They also gained confidence in their public speaking from these experiences.

For Etagu, serving as a panel facilitator deepened her skill set:

“As a facilitator, the most meaningful thing is learning how to ask questions. I am always asked questions, but I learned that day how to transition from one question to the next question. It’s a talent to learn. I’d give a little comment about one question or response and then transition to the next question. And that’s the beauty of the transition – you can also add to what has already been said and add your perspective, especially if you understood the question a little differently.”



CHALLENGES

For student parents balancing school, work, and child care things come up last minute. Sometimes a child gets sick or they are called in for an unexpected work shift. Schedule more than one speaker so that you still have at least one student speaker if a student has to pull out.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. For panel presentations, consider having a student parent facilitate the panel as well.
2. If you are preparing speaker bios, make sure to include the student parent speakers as well. Student parents are honored to be included in this.
3. Focus on student parents' lived experiences. Student parents are very knowledgeable about their personal experiences, challenges, and what resources they have used or would like to see on campus.
4. Write the panel questions or presentation with students. Student parents often have a lot of ideas about what they'd like to share⁵.
5. Provide an option for a student's children to attend the panel or speaking engagement with them and/or provide child care during the event.

Sometimes the student doesn't have child care and this is the only feasible way for them to attend. Additionally, their children are with them throughout their college journey, so having them present when they speak drives home this point. And seeing children playing rarely fails to make audience members smile, even if there is the occasional disruption.



5. See Appendix A for a list of sample questions, written largely by student parent leaders at SFCC.

6. Coach student parents about how to include these types of speaking engagements on their resumes.
7. Prepare student parent speakers in advance.

- Discuss who the audience is, the size of the audience, and what they can expect at the conference, panel, or event.
- If there are specific expectations for what they wear to the events, discuss these expectations, but try not to be too restrictive. Don't create an additional burden of them needing to get clothes they don't already have.
- Help them practice their responses to the questions or their sections of the presentation in advance. Emphasize their personal experiences and how presentation content connects to it.
- If possible practice in the space where they will be speaking; this makes it familiar so they will be more comfortable in the space during the presentation or panel. Practice with a microphone if one will be used during the event.
- If they will be fielding questions from the audience, talk about how to handle this; let them know that they don't have to answer anything that feels too personal or that they are not comfortable answering.

COMPENSATION

At SFCC, student panelists and presenters are frequently selected from the Student Parent Alliance, so students include the time devoted to these events in their hourly alliance timesheets. When presenters have not been members of the alliance, we have also provided gift cards to compensate students for their time both preparing in advance of the presentation and participating in the presentation.

WORK STUDY POSITIONS



A student parent work study position is another opportunity to leverage existing institutional funding to promote parent leadership and voice. While student parents fill a multitude of work study positions at SFCC, the position within our Student Parent Success Program specifically focuses on student parent support and advocacy.



Our work study students have participated in campus meetings and committees with their staff supervisor, including contributing ideas and selecting supplies for family friendly campus spaces and helping plan family events.



They have also developed marketing materials for classes and activities.



Student workers helped develop the curriculum for our College Ready workshop series⁶ for parents seeking to enroll at SFCC. This included advising departments across the college about curriculum content, and supporting implementation of the class by leading icebreakers, co-leading campus tours, contacting participants before the class and between classes, and preparing supplies for class sessions.

6. See Appendix D for more details on College Ready.

BENEFITS

- Earn income for their family while in school.
- Most find work study to be more flexible than many jobs because the schedule is designed around school schedules and child care.
- Gain professional skills such as:
 - Professional communications, both written and verbal
 - Scheduling and facilitating meetings, including creating agendas
 - Preparing for meetings and events
 - Creating marketing materials
 - Learning about who does what at the college and how to connect other students with the right individuals and departments

CHALLENGES

As noted in the Student Parent Alliance section, since the pandemic we have seen a drop in participation of students at campus activities, which Student Parent Alliance members said challenged their sense of motivation as an advocate. One of our student workers was more intensively involved in planning and coordinating events with staff and so felt this sense of disappointment more acutely. At the same time, she shared that it was important for staff to help contextualize the situation as part of a broader trend and not a failing of the program or students involved. She also noted the learning opportunity to debrief and experiment with offering different activities or holding them on different days and times.

By nature, work study positions may have a lot of turnover from one semester to the next. This type of position includes a broad set of tasks and the student worker is often developing new skills that require more supervision. We've found the position most effective when a student is in the position for multiple semesters, but single semester students can be successful with additional support and supervision.

"This work helped me shift from a self-focused mindset to one that's more community-oriented and empathetic. I didn't grow up with strong models for how to make friends or be part of something bigger than myself, so learning to participate in a team and support a larger mission was deeply important. It helped me grow not just as a student or parent, but as a person." – Ava

"This position helped build my resume. A lot of the experience I got in this position I have now been able to use in my current job as an Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) advisor. I learned how to work in an office, what the different departments of a college do and how to work with people in those departments, and how to do outreach to people in the community." – Jenelle



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide an orientation packet or guide to help onboard student workers. Include a written overview of expectations, common tasks, contacts, and how-tos, including for basic office tasks.
2. Offer opportunities for professional development such as participating in the same trainings and on-boarding that staff are taking.
3. In schools without designated student parent support staff, you can still create a work study position focused on parenting students within a department such as student services. In this case, it is recommended that the supervisor is informed about the student parent population at the institution, the challenges student parents experience, and best practices in the field.
4. Additionally, having specific objectives for the work study student, such as outcomes for outreach or hosting an event, can help focus the student's work specifically on the student parent population.
5. Help student workers who are focused on student parent support to connect with their peers in similar positions across colleges/universities online to create a support and advocacy network.

COMPENSATION

Work study funding is provided through federal or state financial aid, according to the federal/state work study policies and pay rate set by the institution.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT



College and university student government associations often have senator or commissioner roles to represent special populations. Creating a “student parent senator” role ensures that parenting students have more visibility and that their voices are integrated into the official student opinion on campus.

BENEFITS

Incorporating student parent voice in college governance ensures that student parent concerns are reflected in college policies.

Student parents can influence student government and college events to be inclusive and family-friendly.

CHALLENGES

In institutions in which the student government is less active or has weak influence on campus, this role may not be as meaningful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

If there is a student parent advisory group or alliance on campus, the student parent senator can serve as a liaison between student government and the advisory group.

COMPENSATION

Many student government positions on college and university campuses are paid positions. This is a great opportunity to leverage existing institutional funding to compensate student parents for their leadership.





PARTICIPATE IN MEDIA INTERVIEWS & PRESS RELEASES

Your college is likely asked to give occasional media interviews on topics that impact student parents. These media requests may be specific to the student parent experience but can also be focused on campus child care, housing, food insecurity, or other student basic needs. These interviews are a great opportunity to lift up student parents' voices at your institution.

Additionally, student parents can author letters to the editor to share their experiences at your college or university with the community.

BENEFITS

As Jackie explains, seeing her story in local media was a meaningful and empowering experience:

"I had the opportunity to participate in a media interview with the Santa Fe New Mexican where I shared my story as a student parent. It was incredibly meaningful to have a news outlet reach out and want to hear my perspective. Seeing my experiences reflected in the paper felt validating and empowering; it made me feel like my accomplishments were recognized and that my story truly mattered. I would recommend that other colleges consider offering similar opportunities to student parents, as it helps build confidence, visibility, and a sense of belonging within the campus community."



CHALLENGES

Media reporters often have very tight deadlines; it can be challenging for a student parent with a busy schedule to make time for this on short notice. When you've already engaged student parents in other leadership opportunities outlined in this guide, you are more likely to have a couple of students you know you can turn to on short notice for a media request.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Prepare in advance a list of student parents who are interested in these opportunities so that you can call them quickly when there is media interest.
2. For journalistic integrity, student parents shouldn't be coached on what they are going to say to the reporter, but briefly preparing them for a media interview before connecting them with the reporter is still important. This includes:

- Briefly explain the topic of the article and why you've reached out to them to participate in an interview.
- Let them know that anything they say can be "on the record" unless they ask that it not be.
- Assure them that they don't have to answer any questions they don't feel comfortable answering/don't want to answer.
- Discuss any expectations they may want to set with the reporter such as whether or not they are ok with their children's names and/or images being included in the article.

COMPENSATION

Media interviews are an exception to the expectation to compensate student parents for their time sharing their perspective. It is discouraged in this case as it may be viewed as a conflict of interest.

Appendix A: Suggested Student Parent Panel Questions

The majority of the questions below were written by student parents at Santa Fe Community College. We encourage you to co-create questions with the student parents on your panels as well. Use the below questions as a starting point for students to choose from, but don't limit yourselves to these. Many student parents are eager to share their perspectives, so they are great at recommending the questions they wish someone would ask them!

Introductions and Motivation

1. To start, please share your name and tell us about your kids (names, ages) and what you are studying (major/degree).
2. Why did you decide to attend college? What was your motivation?
3. (For students who returned after a break in education) When did you know you were ready to go back to school and how did you know you were ready?
4. What is your long-term career goal?
5. Who is your superhero?
6. Who is your role model?

Challenges

1. What would you like to see change for student parents at [institution]?
2. What is one change you would like to see on campus to better support student families?
3. What would you change or improve about how colleges support student parents?
4. Have you ever felt misunderstood or underestimated as a student parent? How did you navigate that? What could [institution] do differently to prevent that for future student parents?
5. What has been the most unexpected challenge—and the greatest reward—of being a student parent?
6. How do you manage self-care while juggling school and parenting?
7. How do you balance parenting, school, work, and your own needs?
8. What negative emotions has parenting while in school brought up and how do you manage these?

Strengths and Dreams

1. Can you share a success story or a proud moment from your experience as a student parent?
2. Can you talk about a moment when you felt proud of yourself as both a student and a parent?
3. What would you like the leaders at the college to know about student parents?
4. How have your children influenced your academic goals or your perspective as a student?
5. What are your long-term dreams for yourself and your child, and how does college fit into that vision?



What's Working

1. Please share your experience going to school, being a parent, and working.
 - a. What resources and support make this possible?
 - b. What resources and support do you need to balance these roles?
2. Tell us about your experience using [family friendly space or service at institution].
3. What supports you the most as a student parent at [institution]?
4. What has been the most helpful support you've received as a student parent?
5. What kind of support (emotional, institutional, or social) has made the biggest difference for you as a student parent?

Recommendations for Change

1. What are some ways that the school can support parenting students?
 - a. Spaces
 - b. Supplies (like wipes and diapers)
2. How can we make school easier for you?
3. How can instructors (professors/faculty) show up for student parents?
4. How can faculty and staff better support and understand student parents in their classrooms or offices?
5. If you had a magic wand that you could wave and accomplish one thing, what would you do for student parents at [institution]?
6. If you had a million dollars, what's the one thing you would spend it on for student parents at [institution]?

Impact

1. How has going to college affected other aspects of your life like being a parent or an employee?
2. What does participating in (specific resource or event) mean to you?
3. What impact has (specific program, resource, event) had on you as a student? As a parent? What impact has this had on your child(ren)? Or as a family?
4. What advice would you give to other student parents who are just starting their college journey?
5. How has being a parent shaped your sense of identity within your campus community?

Appendix B: Building Student Parent Leadership Opportunities Guiding Questions

As you expand student parent leadership opportunities at your institution, consider some of the below questions to inform your efforts.

Panels and Presentations

- Do we currently host any student panels that could include student parents?
- Are there upcoming events or site visits for which we could organize a student parent panel?
- Are there opportunities to feature a student parent panel during beginning of year/semester events or regularly scheduled professional development for staff and faculty?
- Are there conferences or community events at which staff are presenting (or submitting proposals to present) and at which we could also include a student parent speaker?

Work Study

- In what programs or departments could a work study position specifically focus on supporting student parents?
- Which staff in these programs or departments could supervise this work study position?
- What are specific projects that a student worker could support or lead in these programs or departments?
- How can we incorporate a specific student parent focus for these projects?

Student Government

- Do we have an active student government on campus?
- Does our student government include positions to represent specific populations or interest groups?
- How are the specific population or interest group positions included in student government determined? What is the process for adding one?
- What is the nomination or election process to place someone in this type of position?

Media/Press

- Are we promoting college/university initiatives to local press including student parent supports, campus child care, student housing, student basic needs? Are there opportunities to include a student parent's perspective?
- When media outlets contact the college/university marketing department with requests to interview students, who is the marketing department contacting to field those requests? Does that individual have connections with student parents?

Compensation

- Are there existing funding sources that could incorporate student parents' leadership contributions?
- What additional funding sources could we look into?

Appendix C: Creating a Student Parent Alliance Worksheet

Does my college/university have a strong student-organized club culture? OR
Are there student parents at my college/university interested in self-organizing
a student parent alliance?

YES

FOR STUDENT-LED:

How can we support students to self-organize a student parent alliance?

In which projects/initiatives could we proactively request the student parent alliance's input
and co-design? How can we compensate student parents for their contributions?

What resources (space, funding, child care, etc) can we provide to support this student club?

Appendix C: Creating a Student Parent Alliance Worksheet

NO

FOR STAFF-LED:

In what projects or initiatives are we genuinely interested in receiving and integrating student parent input, feedback and co-design?

How can we break this project into components to meaningfully engage students within the timeframe of each semester?

What are small opportunities to support and build students' leadership in this group?
What does the next level of leadership development look like?

How can we compensate student parents for their contributions?

Appendix D: Examples of Student Parent Alliance Activities at SFCC

Below are a few examples of ways we've engaged our Student Parent Alliance members and work study student in different leadership activities.

Co-designing College Ready

College Ready is a 5-week cohort-based workshop series that we created at SFCC to help parents from the community without college degrees to enroll at SFCC. Student parents were engaged in designing College Ready from the beginning. We had a general idea that we wanted to create a workshop series on this topic and started by asking our student worker and a student parent fellow what they wished they had known and what they found confusing when they started enrolling at the college as a student parent. They were very clear from the start that the sessions should be hands on and walk participants through processes such as admissions and financial aid applications, not just give "how to" presentations. This became and remains a guiding principle of College Ready.

Next we used the students' input to identify the departments/offices at the college that would be most knowledgeable to address the topics we'd discussed. We brought the students together with the staff for meetings and framed these meetings to make it clear that the students had recommended the topics and the concept of "doing, not telling." We encouraged staff to solicit ideas from the students during these meetings and proactively asked the students what they thought when staff shared ideas. The students were involved in a series of these meetings from initially deciding on session topics through outlining the content of each of the sessions. One student worker also helped us organize and was present to staff our first two cohorts, so she participated in our debriefing conversations of these sessions and recommended changes for next time.

Student parent leadership continued after the design phase. SFCC Student Parent Alliance members help advertise the program by sharing it to groups on social media and in their communities.

Our student worker or another Student Parent Alliance member leads an icebreaker at the start of each session. We often ask a couple of student parents to attend a session to speak to the class about their experiences as a student parent and answer participants questions.

We also have had student parents co-lead the campus tour in each cohort. For the first cohort, the student tour leaders helped identify all the locations they thought should be included (especially the family friendly spaces on campus). Then we met together with the students and staff from our Engagement and Recruitment Department to go over and edit the route and we clearly wrote out for each stop on the tour who would be speaking and what information they would share. Generally staff will talk about a campus service and the students share the family friendly aspects of the space or service and their own experiences using it. Even when the same staff are co-leading the tour from one cohort to the next, we have this planning meeting every time to ensure that the students are really being given the space to co-lead the tours.

Finally, we conduct evaluation surveys at the end of each cohort and integrate feedback from participants into future cohorts.



Gathering Input and Feedback on the NMSPA Website

Student parent input was important to us when creating the New Mexico Student Parent Alliance website. As initial content was being developed, consultants met with our Student Parent Alliance members to learn more from them about the resources they find helpful and the resources they would like to learn more about. This input was integrated into website content for the student section. During the graphic design phase, we showed the alliance members three different layouts in a meeting and facilitated a discussion for them to share what they liked and disliked about each and revisited the type of content they thought would be helpful to student parents, especially when they were just starting their college journeys.

While the student-focused web content was being developed, we also shared draft documents and asked for their feedback and additions. We have found that we receive the most meaningful input from students when we provide some structure for them to provide feedback, so we asked a few guiding questions:

- Is there anything that sounds confusing or you don't think makes sense?
- Is there anything that you think is unnecessary to include?
- Is there anything missing that you think should be added?
- Do you have any other ideas or thoughts about this you'd like to share?



After launching the initial website, we asked them to review each page. We again created a document for them with a link for each page and table for them to fill in with the questions:

- What do you like on this page?
- What is missing from this page? What would you add?
- What is confusing on this page?
- Do you have any other suggestions for this page?



Engaging Student Parents in Campus and Family Events

Our Student Parent Alliance members have played different roles in organizing and staffing campus and family events depending on the type of event and students' interests. For example, for end of semester family celebrations we have hosted, we've asked alliance members where they would like it held/the type of activities it should include and have used that to select an event venue or theme. Due to procurement requirements, staff need to step in to handle the actual booking. We have also asked alliance members to create an activity that they can lead at the event such as "icebreaker bingo." They have also helped with set-up and sign-in at these events.

For some of our family events, when we've asked student parents for input and they are particularly busy with school, parenting, and other obligations, they've declined to take a planning role, but still contribute to the events. It's important to recognize

and respect students' self-identified time limitations and provide opportunities for engagement to whatever extent they feel they have capacity. In these cases, often they will share the events on social media and help with sign-in and other staffing needs at the event.

Similarly, when we're tabling at a campus or community event, we don't always need a lot of planning. Sometimes we just share with them about the event and audience and they sign up to attend with staff and talk to attendees about their experiences as student parents.

There are a variety of ways to engage student parents to different degrees in planning or staffing events. In most cases, our work study student has played a larger role in the planning of these activities and events because they spend much more time with staff and have more time dedicated to planning and staffing these activities.



SFCC STUDENT AUTHORS



Miniya Hinson is a mom of 2 little's, a toddler and infant. She's a single mom navigating motherhood and womanhood. She's working towards her degree in early childhood education and hopes to start a homeschool co-op specializing in outdoor schooling. Community is important to her and being a part of the SFCC Student Parent Alliance helps her to connect with fellow parents and support them on their journey through school and balancing life.

Jenelle Lovelette returned to higher education at the Santa Fe Community College at the age of 26 with a newborn and 3 year old child. Through the support provided by the Student Parent Success Program Jenelle was able to graduate from Santa Fe Community College with an Associate of Applied Science, General Studies. Jenelle plans to continue her education at the University of Northern Colorado to receive a Master's degree in Dietetics. Being neurodivergent herself and raising neurodivergent children, Jenelle enjoys supporting parents raising neurodivergent children. Jenelle believes that being a parent does not disqualify you from pursuing education; you can be a great parent and a great student, with the proper support.



Ava Molby is pursuing a Liberal Arts degree with plans to become an actuary—combining her love for numbers, logic, and problem-solving to support data-driven decision-making in complex systems. She's also a devoted mother to a young son, who motivates her to work hard and create a stable, meaningful life for them both. Outside of school and work, she enjoys writing, political philosophy, and deep conversations that challenge assumptions, along with nature walking with her dog, quiet moments of reflection, and creative self-expression through poetry and makeup.



SFCC STUDENT AUTHORS



Brenda Pinedo Macedo is pursuing her associate degree in early childhood education at Santa Fe Community College and is part of the APRENDE program. She works as an Assistant Teacher at Brillante Early Learning Center in Albuquerque, part of Explora Museum. Originally from Peru, Brenda is passionate about cultural exchange, holistic education, and supporting young children's growth through both professional training and hands-on experience.

Jackie Rodriguez is a first-generation college student and proud parent to a four-year-old. She is currently finishing her associate degree in criminal justice at Santa Fe Community College (SFCC). She notes that graduating will be a significant milestone that reflects her dedication, perseverance, and passion for making a positive impact in her community. Balancing parenthood and academic life have strengthened her resilience, and she is excited to take the next steps toward a meaningful career in the criminal justice field.



Etagu Wondimu is a mother of two and currently studying early childhood education. She works at the Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) Kids Campus as a teacher assistant. Since 2022 Etagu has been an advocate for student parents at SFCC. She has participated in and facilitated student parent panel discussions for site visits by funders and government officials. She also participated with her family in campus photoshoots, helped plan family friendly events and campus spaces, and contributed to a higher education guide about student parents' leadership and voice. She is a member of the Santa Fe Family Leadership Council. She advocates for the families' voices to be heard and for early childhood services.



NEW MEXICO STUDENT PARENT ALLIANCE

The New Mexico Student Parent Alliance is dedicated to empowering and uplifting student parents and their families by promoting postsecondary success through multigenerational support. We collaborate with community organizations and higher education institutions across New Mexico to create lasting positive outcomes for student parents and future generations.



RESEARCH

Statewide and institutional surveys of student parent needs, assets, and priorities



LEADERSHIP

Building student parents' leadership and advocacy skills



POLICY

Education and advocacy for policies that promote student parent success



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Training and guides for NM public colleges and universities to become student parent champions



KNOWLEDGE

Resources to help NM student parents navigate college from application to graduation





Early Childhood Center of Excellence
New Mexico Student Parent Alliance

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Santa Fe Community College
6401 Richards Avenue
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87508

—

nmspa@sfcc.edu

—

NMSPA.org SFCC.edu/eccoe



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