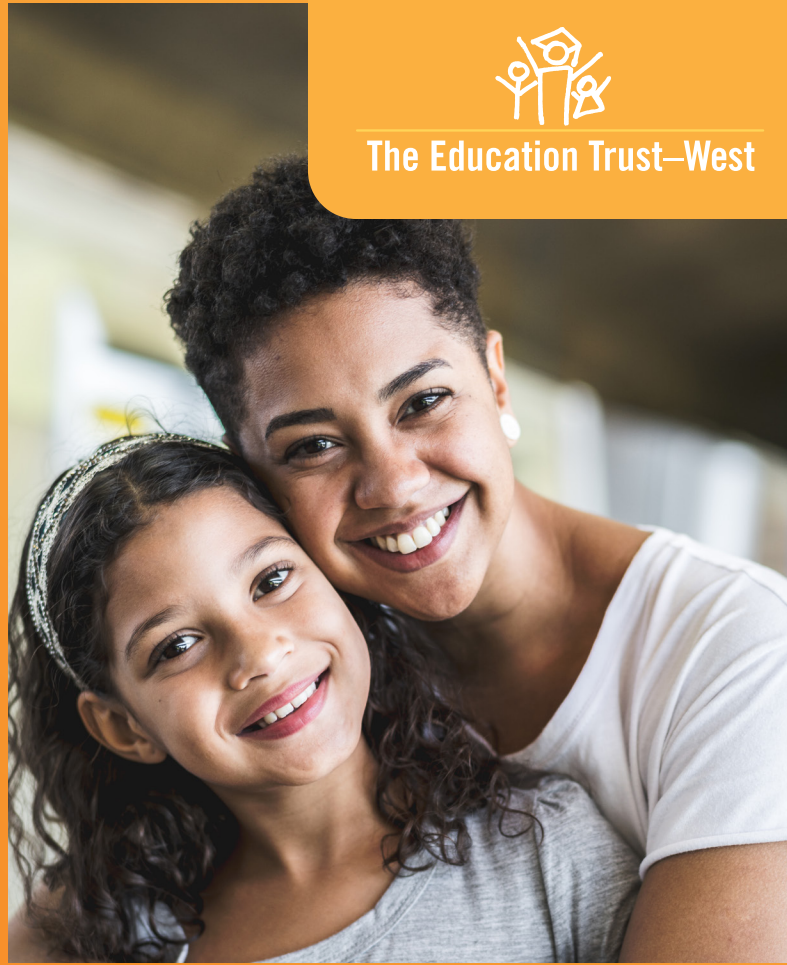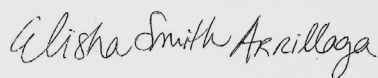The Education Trust—West

Supporting Success for Parenting and Unhoused Women of Color

NO MATTER HOW GOOD OUR INTENTIONS, WE CANNOT SAY WE SUPPORT STUDENTS UNTIL WE HEAR THEIR VOICES AND KEEP THEIR STORIES FRONT AND CENTER.

All too often, the students who most require support are the same ones whose voices go unheard or ignored. The stories in this report—and the women who told them—are remarkable examples of persistence and progress in the face of adversity. They also shine a glaring light on the longstanding, structural pitfalls that await tens of thousands of women of color who are pursuing undergraduate degrees at California State Universities while raising children, battling housing insecurity, or both.

California's public colleges and universities are a tremendous driver of social mobility, but we have a long way to go to fulfill the promise of truly equal access for all. For women of color who are parents or who are unhoused, the road to a brighter future may be dimmed by inadequate financial aid, and lack of stable support for housing and childcare.

Now, as our nation confronts a historic public health and economic crisis, we have to seize this moment as a turning point. We must reverse the trend that higher education ignores or actively discourages our most historically marginalized students and chart a path that truly addresses the inequities that have only been exacerbated by this crisis. If we hear the voices of students and respond to their stories and experiences with equitable solutions. we can start building a better, fairer California.

Elisha Smith Arrillaga

Dr. Elisha Smith Arrillaga
Executive Director
The Education Trust–West

Executive Summary

Structural racism and class-based inequities help shape career and educational opportunities for women in the United States. As women make career and education gains, women of color (WOC) do not have access to the same level of opportunity. For example, more than half of undergraduates are women, but this statistic obscures the fact that…

White women ( ) are 3.6 times more likely than Black women ( ) and 2.5 times more likely than Latinx ( ) women to be enrolled in a university.[1]

This report shares findings from interviews with parenting and unhoused WOC who attend the California State University (CSU), a mission-driven public university system that provides access to higher education for many Californians. These conversations reveal that parenting and unhoused women experience the following challenges and policy gaps:

Stigma

Although the women we spoke with are active in their classes, they are reluctant to disclose to professors and peers that they are parents or housing insecure because of the stigma associated with these identities.

Financial Aid

Aid currently available to parenting and unhoused students is a major source of support. However, this support is limited and does not accurately reflect the costs of raising a family and securing housing in California.*

Basic Needs Insecurity

Despite having multiple income streams (including but not limited to multiple jobs, financial aid, and loans), the unhoused and parenting students we spoke with faced basic needs insecurity.

Childcare and Housing Resources

Resources for food insecurity (including but not limited to grocery cards, food pantries, and bagged lunches) helped participants bridge gaps between their income and living expenses. However, many could not access supports for childcare and housing – their largest expenses outside of tuition. More can be done to ensure that all students who qualify have access to existing resources.

*Please see Appendix for the cost of attending college

Promoting undergraduate success, particularly for parenting and unhoused WOC, is a necessary part of starting to address educational inequities, promoting the financial well-being of WOC, and investing in California's future.

For the purposes of this report, we highlight experiences and recommendations based on participants who identified as WOC (including cis, trans, nonbinary women), unhoused, and/or parenting.

Recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures and economic disruption. As a result, many marginalized undergraduates – like the parenting and unhoused women described in this report – who already experienced trying circumstances, may question whether they can complete their degrees. The Education Trust–West urges state policymakers and CSU leadership working to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic to take into special consideration the needs of marginalized students.

Investments in educational equity and opportunities for marginalized students can serve as an engine for California's post-pandemic recovery. In particular, state policymakers can support students by excluding Spring 2020 and other semesters/quarters affected by COVID-19 from undergraduates' lifetime eligibility for financial aid.

Campuses can improve upon and increase access to existing resources that target parenting and unhoused students by:

- Establishing coordinated institutional response teams to help ensure that available resources and supports are directed toward parenting and unhoused students.

- Partnering with Head Start & Early Head Start programs to make more childcare slots available.

- Making the Unhoused Student Liaison a standalone position.

Parenting and unhoused students are often burdened by non-tuition costs. The CSU can help alleviate this by:

- Prioritizing marginalized groups in budgetary decisions and financial aid reform.

- Ensuring all eligible students are able to access dependent care allowances.

- Providing more on-campus housing.

Inadequate data serves as a major roadblock to understanding the needs and experiences of these student populations. We recommend the CSU and individual campuses:

- Better track the numbers of parenting and unhoused students to more adequately address their needs.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In the United States, women for decades defied social "norms" and navigated systemic barriers intended to prevent access to formal education and thwart upward mobility.

Nevertheless, women now outnumber men in higher education worldwide, a major sign of progress supported by strong women leaders, policy change, and movement building.[2][3]

However, these statistics obscure the impact of varied experiences, differing resources, and structural racism in women of color's paths into and through college.[4] We embarked on a journey over the last year to garner a better understanding of the experiences of two subsets of women of color enrolled across the California State University: student parents[5] and unhoused students[6]. Despite the fact that parents and unhoused students[7] have been in college for years, their needs have not been adequately addressed.

This report focuses on women across the CSU because the system serves as a critical access point to higher education and is a powerful engine of social mobility. For example, one-third of undergraduates are first-generation[8]. Partially due to its size and student composition, improvements in policy and practice at the CSU have great potential to lift up WOC undergraduates who are parenting and unhoused. In 2009, the CSU launched the Graduation Initiative (GI) 2025 to improve retention and student success. The GI 2025 presents an opportunity to improve upon students supports and to implement targeted institutional responses that are currently lacking or absent for women who are parenting or unhoused.

Estimates – calculated using national statistics – suggest that at least 22 percent of California's undergraduates are parents,[9] yet, with the exception of CSU Fresno, CSU campuses do not systematically track the enrollment data of student parents. Similarly, despite estimates from the CSU suggesting that 12 percent of the student population is housing insecure or unhoused,[10] the system does not track enrollment or outcomes for these populations. Stigma attached both to parenting and being unhoused limits the visibility of these undergraduate populations and may keep them from accessing or advocating for resources.

This report surfaces some of the challenges faced by parenting and unhoused WOC as they navigate inequities within the higher education system and work towards their undergraduate degrees. The women we spoke to have high ambitions for themselves and believe a bachelor's degree will bring economic security; however, more needs to be done to promote their undergraduate success. This report concludes with state and campus-level recommendations to begin addressing those inequities and make lasting investments in the future of higher education for WOC and their families. Investments in WOC's success are investments in California.

KAYLA

This is not Kayla's first time endeavoring to complete a bachelor's degree. During her first attempt, Kayla became pregnant and decided to take some time off from college while she figured out how to juggle and financially afford the new responsibilities in her life. Undeterred and eager to learn and be in a position to provide for her family, Kayla is now a transfer student in her first year at CSU. She regularly checks in with professors to discuss class materials and career ambitions. But she is too afraid to share with professors and classmates that she is constantly juggling work, school, and parenthood.

Kayla has been on the waitlist for on-campus childcare since she enrolled at CSU. Because alternative child-care options are prohibitively expensive, Kayla has to ask for help from friends and relatives, sometimes rushes in/out of class, and occasionally misses lectures or on-campus appointments.

Kayla looks forward to the day when she can fulfill her dream of becoming an engineer. She also looks forward to the stability and peace that her degree will bring her and her family.

Part 1: Parenting Women of Color Undergraduates

Current Needs & Challenges

Visibility

Greater Course Availability

Improved Access to Child Care

Financial Aid and Cost

How Can Parenting Women of Color Be Better Supported?

Parenting WOC have diverse pathways into parenthood and higher education. Some of the women we spoke with became pregnant late in their high school careers and enrolled in college directly after graduating; some became parents while in college; some temporarily deferred schooling while they had children and worked; and others were returning students who had previously attempted a bachelor's degree unsuccessfully. The WOC parents we spoke with shared that caring for children while pursuing a college degree compounded existing systemic inequities, including but not limited to: scheduling challenges, inadequate campus supports, financial challenges, and limited access to child care. Participants shared that they continually weighed the opportunity cost of working and the desire to spend greater amounts of time with their children against the potential benefits of a degree. Their motivation and commitment to completing a degree was exemplified by their perseverance in spite of the challenges they faced.

> " ...it's been rewarding because I feel proud of myself being able to make it through [college] while having my child around. And she's also able to experience the journey itself. And so hopefully she's able to cherish that as she gets older."
>
> **Lola**

> "I'm the first in my family to go to college so I didn't really have [anyone] to look up to. I was pregnant [when I applied] and I didn't know how it would work but thanks to [my high school counselor] I'm here…"
>
> **Star**

> "There were a lot of years in between me going to college…I ended up going back to [college] to pursue the career I really wanted to do."
>
> **Kaitlan**

Visibility and On-Campus Community

Common among nearly all the student parents we spoke[11] with was a desire for greater visibility. Participants did not see their needs and circumstances reflected in course policies and accommodations; for example, course attendance policies did not address the need to stay home with a sick child. The women we spoke to also shared that faculty and/or staff were sometimes unaware of students' rights to maternity/paternity leave. Although pregnancy and birth are protected under Title IX,[12] some faculty are either unaware or unwilling to uphold students' rights:

> "…it's usually like you can take 2 to 3 weeks off [after the birth of a child], you can take a semester off if you wanted to but your professors have to acknowledge that you're going to be gone for those weeks because you just gave birth. And then some professors were like no if you do miss these classes then you're going to fail and you're going to get a zero and you won't be able to pass the class…I guess some professors don't really know [the rights] for mothers or parents."
>
> **Jenny**

Greater awareness and more education about the needs and rights of student parents is necessary to limit infringement upon these.

In addition to having faculty and staff who are aware of student parents' rights and responsibilities, participants want to feel more integrated with campus life, which they feel caters to single students without dependents. They described a child-friendly study space where families can do homework together, game rooms where older children are welcomed, and/or playgrounds as resources that would tangibly help them academically and signal that their whole selves are a part of the campus community. Some of WOC parents we spoke with found community in student parent Facebook pages where they crowdsource information and share personal stories, but this online community cannot take the place of a child-friendly campus where students feel their whole selves and families are welcomed.

Greater Course Availability

The WOC parents we spoke with expressed that the pressures of raising children, working, attending classes, and meeting other personal responsibilities motivate them to complete their degrees quickly, driving their need for more course availability:

> "There's only two class sessions, and they're both during the night time, and they're both only once a week…I pushed back and pushed back and waited another semester to see if [a better time slot would become available but one wasn't available]. So, I ended up just having to take the class…luckily, my mom was able to help me that time."
>
> **Alexis**

Limited course availability can present other obstacles, such as students being unable to register for prerequisite or major classes because they fill up by scheduled registration times:

> "I had to wait to get into [class] because it was just closed by the time it was my time to enroll…. I emailed the professor and asked if I could get a permission number. She said no, so I'm just going to have to wait."
>
> **Kaitlan**

During quarters/semesters when prerequisites or major classes were unavailable to them, some WOC parents shared they enrolled in classes that were interesting but that did not necessarily contribute to their degrees in order to maintain full or part-time student status.

Improved Access to Child Care

For many student parents, lack of child care makes fully engaging as a student difficult. Some women we spoke with experienced low grades resulting from the stress of managing competing priorities with limited access to child care. One parent shared:

> "I've talked to [other parents]. It's that same, similar story. It's very hard for them to study, and the child-care center is probably the only thing that helps them study. Past 5:30, once you take [your children] home…no one else is there to help out."
>
> **Jessica**

Many of the parents we spoke with only had child care during course time and had to skip classes to meet with counselors or take care of bureaucratic tasks (e.g. submit forms to financial aid). As one parent shared:

> "I'm always late because my daycare doesn't start until 12:00 PM. So like, I try and get there a few minutes early, and get her ready. That way, right at 12:00 PM, I can leave to class, or walk fast to class, but basically, [I have access to] daycare from the time my first class starts to the time my last class ends. So I try and like squeeze little things in between classes. Like for instance, my advising meeting, I squeezed in between a class, which made me late for my next class…that's the only time that I have to do anything on campus, is the time that she's in daycare."
>
> **Marie**

During the 2018-19 school year, 18 of the 23 CSU campuses had child-care centers, but the women we spoke with reported experiencing long waitlists.

> "I haven't been able to get my child into childcare because…there's a waitlist so I don't know [if a spot will be available before] I graduate next December…."
>
> **Delilah**

Uncertainty as to whether their family would be admitted to on-campus child-care centers effectively requires many student parents to make alternative child-care arrangements before the start of the semester/quarter.

Recognize that College is Costlier for Women of Color Parents

In addition to the tuition, fees, and room and board that all undergraduates must cover, student parents must financially support dependents and pay for childcare. Many of the women we spoke with struggled to meet their family's needs and pay for college despite having multiple income sources (such as public grants, loans, work-study, full or part-time work, and money from family members, a co-parent, or significant others). In order to reduce their financial burden or simply because they could not afford it, some of the WOC parents we spoke with took fewer classes in a semester, delayed purchasing course materials, and/or avoided purchasing child care – all of which are important to student parents' progress and educational success. A majority of the women we spoke with report that they and their families use basic need services:

> "It's expensive to have a child when you're going to college…because, you know, the money wasn't there, but luckily, the food bank was there…when I needed some lunch, it was there when I needed some dinner."
>
> **Alexis**

Some of the women we spoke with made the difficult decision to prioritize schooling despite the impact on their family's income.

> "I had to cut back my hours that I work so that I could have more time to study and that shrunk my planned budget. So there were times where I was very limited…and [it was hard to afford] gas money or food money…"
>
> **Valerie**

Financial supports are invaluable to the retention of WOC parents. Even small grants (for example to cover books or purchase a computer), from sources like the Educational Opportunity Program and other student support services, can help them feel supported and make college affordable. However, accessing these resources oftentimes required significant work on the participant's behalf:

> "The run around that I would always get is, 'Well have you checked if there's a grant for that…' I feel like having a place where it's consolidated through a website…where students can clearly see the different grants available to them can help those students that do have to pay tuition out of pocket."
>
> **Rosa**

PATRICIA

Not long into her first year, her father's health deteriorated and Patricia and her siblings took over many financial responsibilities. This made it impossible for her to pay her own dorm fees. Unsure of what to do, Patricia slept in her car until it was broken into and she no longer felt safe doing so. While couch surfing at the houses of a few close friends has worked thus far, Patricia has no plans in place for permanent housing.

Patricia carefully manages her budget, planning how to fund living expenses that are not covered by her financial aid award. Despite working multiple jobs, she still depends on grocery cards and food boxes that her campus provides to feed herself.

Despite the many and serious challenges that Patricia has faced during her undergraduate career, she is glad to be at CSU. For example, Patricia's work-study job as a peer academic advisor is important to her financially and emotionally. Patricia feels she can talk to her boss candidly when she needs encouragement during this turbulent time in her life. And despite an academically rough semester that included low grades, Patricia is thriving in a competitive major. She appreciates that she now thinks critically and participates in a club for prospective lawyers. Patricia is excited for the day when she can fulfill her professional ambitions.

Part 2: Unhoused Women of Color Undergraduates

Current Needs & Challenges

Financial Aid and Cost

Administrative Barriers

Access to Existing Resources and Support

How Can Parenting Unhoused Women of Color Be Better Supported?

Most of the unhoused WOC we spoke with are navigating college without financial, social, or emotional support from their families as a result of their status as former foster youth or because their families are managing their own health, financial, and personal crises. They shared that they are living in precarious circumstances: having to shift their housing arrangements multiple times in a semester, sleeping in their cars, being forced to accept unstable and low-paying jobs to meet basic needs and pay for schooling costs, relying on food pantries for meals, and constantly stressing over how they can meet their basic needs and/or help their families.

The unhoused WOC we spoke with described themselves as "on their own" and strongly believed that whether they failed or succeeded depended solely on their strength and ability to persevere over the many stressors and challenges they faced.

A majority of participants we spoke with were able to access resources targeting food insecurity; however, the women we spoke

> "…[these challenges] hit me within all these five years I've been here…[Life] kind of took its toll…I've learned a lot of lessons… so I just feel like once I graduate, like I am going to be very well rounded [and] able to be secure, take care of myself, and just be overall content…"
>
> **Ruby**

with experienced limited housing services. Half of the unhoused women we spoke with actively participate or were aware that they could initiate mental health on their campus if/when they decided to pursue it. Those who participated in counseling found it helpful, highlighting the potential benefit for other students in similar situations. More resources and campus support – especially in the area of housing – are needed to help ensure the success of these women.

> " …even if it seems impossible, even if the class seems hard, I'm going to study until I can't study anymore. So I think it was only possible because of my drive that I have for education. And to get to where I need to be."
>
> **Nay**

> "I think with me, what I categorize as a strong student doesn't necessarily mean academic, but I feel like the experiences that came along with [college] are what built me up as a strong student."
>
> **Ruby**

> "It's like a juggling between working and being in school, it's like, "Do I go to school so I can pay for my future or do I work so I can pay for my school?" But a lot of times, it's just like, well I don't want to miss out on what I'm learning because, I mean this is my avenue to not have…all these money problems…"
>
> **Jenn**

Recognize Unhoused Women of Color's True Financial Need

The default for universities may be to assume that their students have the familial and personal financial resources to pay for tuition and non-tuition expenses. However, for students without a financial cushion (e.g. savings, family members, or significant other who could help them cover expenses) a seemingly small personal or family crisis, or the high cost of an undergraduate education alone may leave them housing insecure.

One major factor that compounds the limited financial resources available to the unhoused WOC we spoke with is that they are largely employed in low-paying jobs with variable hours, requiring them to work overtime or multiple jobs to cover schooling and living expenses.

> "…at some point [I] had three jobs all at once and you know, like that's just what I've had to do to kind of, you know, keep myself afloat. And even then it's still not enough…it kinda sucks to feel like, you know, you're working, you're working, you're working and you just don't have enough still."
>
> **Ruby**

> "I work a minimum wage job so that made it difficult to pay for school…"
>
> **Jessica**

The unhoused WOC we spoke with shared that the financial aid available to them is often insufficient to meet the full costs of college. In addition, unhoused participants did not utilize campus financial resources because they can create further stressors. For example, the women we spoke with explained that while their campuses offered emergency loans they did not apply because they did not believe they would be able to pay the loans back on the required schedule. Federal and state grants are a major source of support, but delays in financial aid distribution are common and can make it difficult to purchase course materials, register for classes, and access secure housing.

> "sometimes you'll get grants and they'll come late…they kind of taught me the value of patience and how to make it work in the future."
>
> **Nay**

Despite being low-income, the unhoused WOC we spoke with receive financial aid packages that include loans and, simply, do not reflect what they are able to pay for. As a result, housing – the largest expense many students face outside of tuition – has become unattainable.

Well-Marketed Housing Resources

Recent legislation means all of California colleges and universities must have an emergency housing plan and a housing liaison in place[13]. However, the majority of unhoused WOC we spoke with had not used emergency housing because they were unaware of its existence or because it was unhelpful in its current form. Ivy longed for housing insecurity support on her campus, unaware of the recent increase in supports her campus had made available:

> "…hopefully [campus] does offer some kind of like online training or workshops or anything to share resources…I'm sure [other students are] struggling and they don't think of school as being the first place they could find support, you know…some of my friends like have had like horrible quarters, you know, because [of housing insecurity] and like I'm sure if they had like some sort of support that they would've been able to do a little better."
>
> **Ivy**

Another challenge is that on many campuses, emergency housing is only available for a short period of time – not long enough for participants to resolve their challenges. The unhoused WOC we spoke with were much more likely to have connected with food and clothing services because these were more widely publicized and more clearly met their needs.

Streamlined Access to Basic Needs Supports

Unhoused participants describe learning to advocate for themselves, needing to be persistent, spending costly amounts of time searching for resources, and developing personal networks as important strategies they utilized to obtain needed financial supports.

> "I've learned that [my campus] isn't really one whole, it's a lot of little programs that go into, like, sometimes they communicate, sometimes they don't, it generally just depends…overall I do get the feeling that whenever I ask for help, I get it."
>
> **Jenn**

Student services offices (e.g. EOP) and individual student services staff or professors are key to whether participants connect to available supports.

> "I do lean on EOP a lot because, I mean, it's my resource…"
>
> **Jenn**

Still, unhoused WOC shared that campus-based financial and basic needs resources are easier to access than county human services resources. County human agency policies and procedures presented many challenges in accessing resources. For example, the women we spoke with found they needed to visit the office in person and during normal business hours – a challenge given their work and class schedules and the cost of travel. The unhoused women we spoke with also shared that their student status may also exclude them from certain social services:[14]

> "…I'm kind of struggling with like a place to stay right now and I've been to the welfare office in [city name] and they just, they just give me food stamps sometimes, but not even all the time."
>
> **Jazmin**

Unhoused students must be made aware of basic needs resources for which they qualify, and administrative barriers must be addressed, particularly for undergraduates who are not already connected to student services groups or whose individual resourcefulness, time, and energy for finding services is limited.

Recommendations

Individual students have many identities, and policies may affect students differently, requiring targeted solutions to support their varied needs. At the Education Trust—West, we work to achieve change in four major policy areas across California:

Ensuring our public education systems – from preschool through college – are adequately and equitably funded.

Holding public education systems accountable to students, families, and communities and pushing for transparent and accessible data.

Equipping a high-performing P-16 educator workforce that reflects the diversity of California's student population.

Ensuring equitable access to a rigorous education that prepares all students — especially students of color, low-income students, and English learners — to be successful in higher education, career, and life.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OUTLINED BELOW SERVE THOSE LARGER GOALS AND TARGET THE NEEDS OF PARENTING AND UNHOUSED STUDENTS. MOST RECOMMENDATIONS APPLY TO BOTH GROUPS; HOWEVER, WE INCLUDE GROUP-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS RELATED TO DEVELOPING A COORDINATED INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE.

Improve and Increase Access to Existing Resources Targeting Parenting and Unhoused Students

The parenting and unhoused undergraduates we spoke to desired greater visibility but were afraid of disclosing their identities as parents and/or unhoused students. One solution to helping student parents and unhoused students feel more integrated and supported on their campuses may be borrowed from UndocuAlly programs[15] – which were developed to recognize and support undocumented students. As part of its Graduation Initiative 2025, the CSU should **establish Student Parent and Unhoused Student "Ally" pilot programs** at a third of its campuses (prioritizing campuses with large numbers of these student populations) to facilitate access to on- and off-campus resources.

Ally program should:

- Include **voluntary trainings where faculty and staff hear student narratives** and help them identify ways in which they can better support student parents and unhoused students.

- "Allies" should also receive **information about campus, state, and federal resources and policies** that impact student parenting and unhoused students.

- After successfully completing ally trainings, faculty and staff should receive a decal or poster; the result is **a network of staff members who are highly visible to students, capable, and ready to respond to parenting and unhoused students** who may approach them seeking support.

Enhance Access to Child Care

Access to reliable and affordable child care significantly improves student parent retention. The majority of CSU campuses currently offer on-campus child care for infants and preschoolers; however, available spots do not meet students' needs.[16] Although 18 of the 23 CSU campuses have child-care centers (two of which are affiliated with Head Start), due to data limitations it is unclear how many CSU student parents are currently served by on-campus child care. However, we estimate that meeting the needs of student parents with children under 6 years of age would require CSU child-care centers to have capacity for at least 27,359 children[17].

One strategy to increasing access and ensuring child care is affordable is **to partner with Head Start & Early Head Start.[18]**

- Head Start provides **wraparound services** such as helping families enroll in financial services and educating parents on positive discipline practices — these are resources that the women we spoke with desired but could not adequately access on campus. Whenever possible, making wraparound services available to the wider student population would deepen this partnership.

- Campuses benefit by having **increased retention and student success rates.**

- Campuses gain access to high-quality child-care centers where **child development** (and related) **majors can complete internships and practicums.**

- Children attending a CSU/Head Start partnering **childcare center** will gain exposure to college, which **can promote college-going later in life.**[19] [20]

Partnership with Head Start may be especially meaningful on the five campuses that do not offer childcare; however, we estimate that the need for childcare outweighs demand across the CSU system. We recommend all campuses explore the benefits of partnering with Early Head Start and Head Start.

Update the Delivery of Existing Housing Insecurity Resources

A necessary step to ensuring that campuses address needs security is improving the delivery of currently available housing insecurity services. Currently, the Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act[21] requires CSU campuses to designate a financial aid staff member to serve as a Homeless & Foster Student liaison who can connect students to campus, local, state, and federal resources for students. To improve upon the supports this role provides, the following changes must be implemented:

- Avoid **the term "homeless" when referring to unhoused students** since it can introduce stigma. Moreover, stereotypical images associated with "homeless" may not resonate with undergraduates, students may not identify with the term, and, therefore, students may not seek resources from the liaison.

- We recommend that by 2023, **the Unhoused Student Liaison be made standalone position.[22]** In light of the expected economic and personal impacts of COVID-19, California and the CSU should explore and implement strategies which improve the delivery of available supports for housing insecure and unhoused students. Having a designated staff member focused solely on supporting unhoused students would improve the capacity of the liaison to deliver services.

- Engage in a marketing and outreach campaign to **increase the number of unhoused students whom the liaison supports.**

Expand Access to Resources Addressing Non-tuition Costs

The cost of caring for dependents and housing can add significant financial burdens for these parenting and unhoused students – and potentially threatens institutions' ability to retain them. As our state continues to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and subsequent economic downturn, we recommend that the Legislature and Governor prioritize low-income students, student parents, housing insecure students, and other marginalized students when making decisions about state spending and financial aid (for more on redesigning financial aid in California see here). In the short-term, this can be achieved by the state **excluding courses taken during Spring 2020 and other terms affected by COVID-19 from undergraduates' lifetime eligibility for financial aid.** Limiting marginalized undergraduates' eligibility during this period would hinder their ability to access financial resources and put their retention further at risk.

Ensure Student Access
Dependent Care Allowances

To serve all students, **by 2025 the CSU should ensure that all parenting students' financial aid packages account for dependents.** Because of data limitations, it is difficult to know how often financial aid offices exercise professional judgement[23] to increase the aid awarded to student parents. However, the gap between the cost of attendance marketed to students and what parents actually pay is wide. Estimates by California Competes show that California's parenting undergraduates pay an average annual premium of $7,592 per child[24] – this is equivalent to tuition at CSU. Moreover, many factors (for example the timing of a birth/adoption) can impact whether financial aid application information accurately reflects a student parent's family composition.

> By 2025 the CSU should ensure that all parenting students' financial aid packages account for dependents.

Provide More On-Campus Housing

Towards the larger goal of providing housing to all students, **by 2025 the CSU should build sufficient units to house 20% of their student body.** In addition, the system should **provide guidance to campuses on how to prioritize making new units available for marginalized students** like the groups discussed in this report. In a context where housing prices in California are among the highest in the nation, on-campus room and board may provide an affordable option for housing, transportation, and food ($16,517 versus off-campus $17,048[25]). Currently, 14% of CSU students live on campus; the 39%[26] who live without family off-campus would likely see their total cost of attendance reduced if they lived in dorms.

> By 2025 the CSU should build sufficient units to house 20% of their student body…[and] provide campuses guidance on how to prioritize making new units available for marginalized students.

Use Data to Improve Services for Parenting and Unhoused Students

Having data that is disaggregated, publicly available, and easily accessible is critical for California's colleges and universities to be able to provide equitable opportunities for all students. Simply put, campus and system leaders need accurate data to make the best decisions for students. They also have a responsibility to provide the public and other stakeholders with information about the performance of our colleges and universities.

To better meet the needs of parenting and unhoused students, all 23 campuses should **identify ways to reliably and efficiently collect and track data about students who are parents or experiencing housing insecurity.** One approach to consider is that taken by the California Community College system, in which **enrolling students are asked to self-identify** as unhoused.[27] Current estimates, based on national statistics and available samples, highlight that these populations are ubiquitous at the CSU. However, in the absence of systemic reporting on the numbers of parenting and unhoused students, these student populations are too often ignored and insufficient resources have been directed to meet their needs.

> All 23 campuses should identify ways to reliably and efficiently collect and track data about students who are parents or experiencing housing insecurity.

Conclusion

The women of color described in this report demonstrate an incredible commitment to working towards their dreams and persevering in the face of obstacles. Their stories also highlight how structural inequities and policy gaps can thwart social mobility. In many ways, they represent the experiences of many others striving in the shadows towards a better future. California has made progress in supporting its most marginalized communities, such as prioritizing access in the Master Plan for Higher Education and providing state grants to undocumented students; however, we still need to address systemic inequities.

Even as this report is being prepared, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cause widespread upheaval, throwing the livelihoods and education of many into a state of uncertainty. This crisis also provides new opportunities for our state to invest in the education of marginalized undergraduates, like WOC who are parents or unhoused, and, consequently, in future generations. We have before us an valuable opportunity to change course and ensure that individual student resources – financial and otherwise — do not determine their future.

Appendix

Research Methods

This report shares findings from a larger study of CSU students. It summarizes findings related to, first, WOC student parents and, second, WOC unhoused students. Participants were drawn from CSU campuses where recent efforts to improve the availability of basic needs resources for all students may benefit parenting and unhoused students. Participants were recruited with the help of Student Affairs and Student Services offices as well as on-campus child-care centers.

Interviews focused on participants' academic, financial, and social experiences, as well as their engagement in campus-based services. Surveys were used to capture participants' demographic information and information related to their enrollment, finances, and academic preparation. Participants were asked to review preliminary analyses of the study results and critically examine whether we accurately understood and represented the experiences of unhoused and parenting students. We also partnered with faculty members at each campus who reviewed study methods, assisted in recruitment, and provided analysis peer checks.

Cost of Attending the CSU

Average Cost Across the CSU System

Tuition	$5,742.00
Fees	$1,386.09
Other expenses	$2,865.00
On-Campus Room & Board	$12,188.00
Books and Supplies	$1,844.82

On-campus housing costs have a range of $6,771 (from $10,587 to $17,358). Housing is least expensive at CSU: Fresno, Stanislaus, and Northridge. Housing is most expensive at San Jose State, San Diego State, and Cal Poly.

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Endnotes

1   U.S. Department of Education, NCES, "Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, sex, and age: Selected years, 1970 through 2027," (Washington, D.C., 2017)

2   U.S. Department of Education, NCES, "Total fall enrollment in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by attendance status, sex, and age: Selected years, 1970 through 2027," (Washington, D.C., 2017)

3   In the US, 56% of undergraduates are female.

4   Throughout this report the terms parenting student, student parent, parenting WOC, and parenting participant are used interchangeably.

5   Throughout this report the terms unhoused student, housing insecure student, unhoused WOC, and unhoused participant are used interchangeably.

6   Throughout this report the terms unhoused student, housing insecure student, unhoused WOC, and unhoused participant are used interchangeably.

7   For more on undergraduate housing insecurity within the national context, see for example: Goldrick-Rab, Sara, Jed Richardson, and Anthony Hernandez. "Hungry and homeless in college: Results from a national study of basic needs insecurity in higher education." (2017).

8   "Diversity," California State University, accessed April 20, 2020, https://www2.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/diversity/Pages/default.aspx

9   "Today's Students: Student Parents Bain California," (Washington: D.C.: Young Invincibles, 2019)

10   "Crutchfield, Rashida, Keesha Clark, Sara Gamez, Aaron Green, Deidre Munson, and Hanna Stribling. "Serving Displaced and Food Insecure Students in the CSU." California State University, Long Beach (2016).

11   Recent work by GH similarly finds that student parents are highly reluctant to disclose that they have children. "Uncovering the Student-Parent Experience and Its Impact on College Success," (Washington: D.C.: Generation Hope, 2020), http://supportgenerationhope.org/student-parents-report

12   U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, accessed April 26, 2020, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-know-rights-201306-title-ix.html

13   "Postsecondary education: Success for Homeless Youth in Higher Education Act (AB 801)," (Sacramento, California, 2016)

14   Madeline St. Amour, "Effects of SNAP Changes," Inside Higher Ed, January 20, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/20/how-snap-rule-changes-could-affect-college-students

15   An example of UndocuAlly program can be found in, "Dream Success Center," California State University Long Beach, Accessed April 27, 2020, http://web.csulb.edu/divisions/students/dream/advocacy/ally.html

16   Miller, Kevin, Barbara Gault, and Abby Thorman, "Improving Child Care Access to Promote Postsecondary Success among Low-Income Parents Report" # C378, Institute for Women's Policy Research. 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036, 2011.

17   Based on national estimates of the average percentages of undergraduates with children under 6 and current CSU enrollment. Due to data limitations, this analysis does not account for families with multiple children. "Parents in College By the Numbers" # C481, Institute for Women's Policy Research. 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036, 2019.; "State Supported Enrollment," The California State University, accessed April 27, 2020, https://tableau.calstate.edu/views/SelfEnrollmentDashboard/EnrollmentSummary?iframeSizedToWindow=true&:embed=y&:showAppBanner=false&:display_count=no&:showVizHome=n

18   Nationally, 46 percent of U.S. undergraduates with children under age 6 are income-eligible for Head Start.

19   Barbara Gault, Lindsey Reichlin Cruse, Tessa Holtzman, Susana Contreras-Mendez, "Head Start-College Partnerships as a Strategy for Promoting Family Economic Success: A Study of Benefits, Challenges, and Promising Programs# C485," Institute for Women's Policy Research. 1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036, 2019.

20   The Institute for Women's Policy Research has developed the following typology of potential partnerships: 1) on-campus Head Start services with services specifically targeting student, 2) stand-alone on-campus Head Start child care centers, 3) off-campus Head Start programs that serve student parents attending a partner college/university, and 4) off-campus Head Start programs that have an educational or workforce pathway for non-student parents that is operated in collaboration with a college.

21   In a review of 7 campuses, ETW did not find an example where the role of liaison was held by a staff member who only served in this capacity.

22   "The Smart Guide to Financial Aid," FinAid, accessed May 11, 2020, https://www.finaid.org/fafsa/negotiation.phtml

23   Estimate is based on childcare and food costs for dependent. "Clarifying the True Cost of College for Student Parents," (Oakland, CA: California Competes, 2020), https://californiacompetes.us2.list-manage.com/trackclick?u=69ffc695d104aa0a5fc9f591f&id=ecd638b-b36&e=8f5f11d29d."

24   EducationTrust-West analysis of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2018-19 Institutional Characteristics & 12-Month Enrollment, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics), http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds.

25   "SEARS Survey Spotlight: Housing," (Sacramento, CA: CSAC, 2019), https://www.csac.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/ssp_housing.pdf

26   "Helping Homeless Youth Succeed in College: Strategies for Transitioning From High School to College," (School House Connections: Washington D.C., 2019), https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Strategies-for-Transitioning-from-High-School-to-College.pdf

27   Personal communication with California Homeless Youth Project (October 28, 2019)