

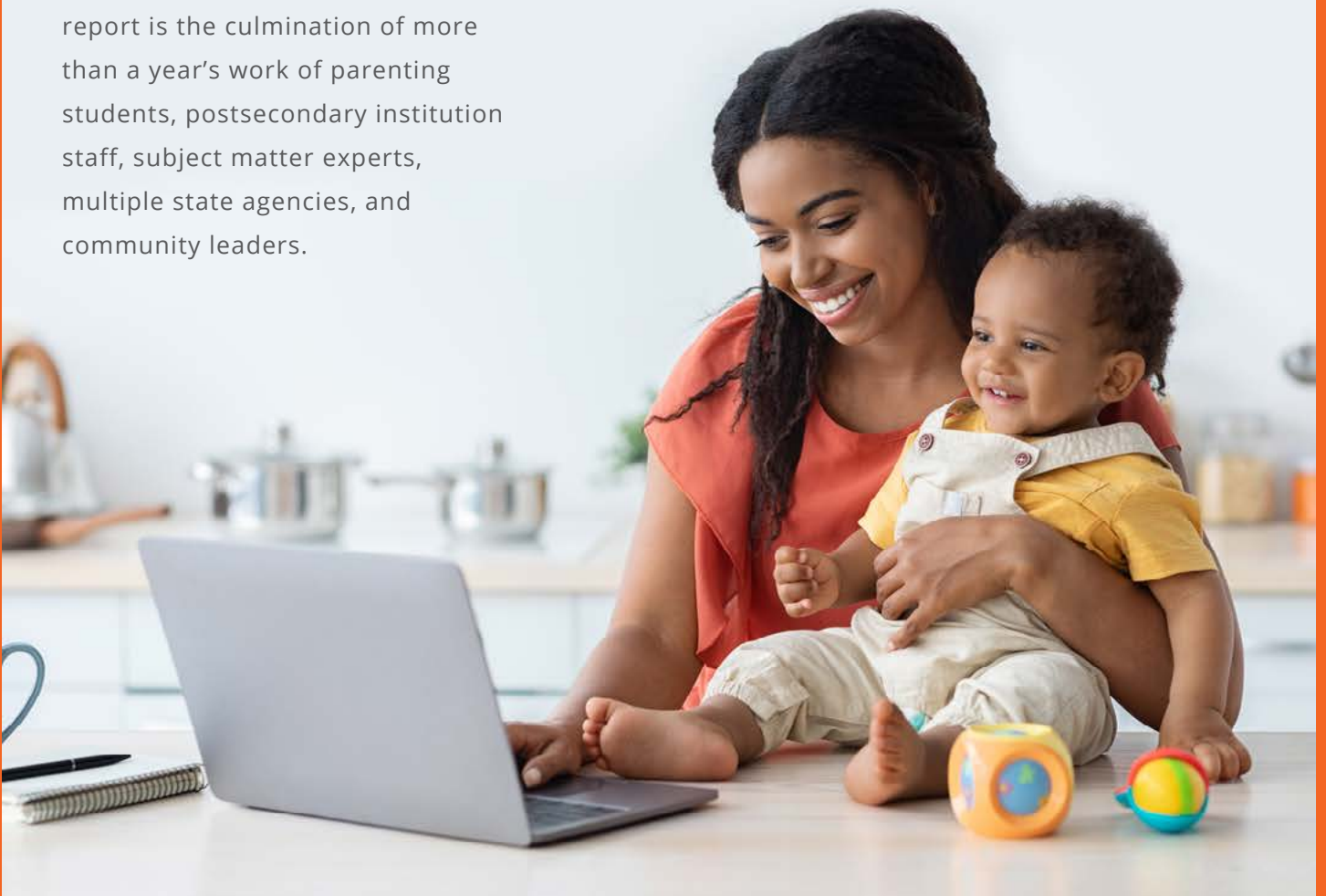
Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

# PA PARENT PATHWAYS LEARNING NETWORK

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## POLICY REPORT

The Pennsylvania Parent Pathways Learning Network (PPLN) policy report is the culmination of more than a year's work of parenting students, postsecondary institution staff, subject matter experts, multiple state agencies, and community leaders.



December 31, 2022

Acting Secretary Meg Snead

Pennsylvania Department of Human Services

Acting Secretary Eric Hagarty

Pennsylvania Department of Education

## DEAR ACTING SECRETARIES SNEAD AND HAGARTY,

With great pleasure, we present the Pennsylvania Parent Pathways Learning Network (PPLN) policy report, which represents the culmination of more than a year's work of parenting students, postsecondary institution staff, subject matter experts, multiple state agencies, and community leaders.

Recognizing that there are many challenges faced by parenting students, the PPLN Advisory Committee decided to focus on four types of support with deep connections to student success: food, child care, housing, and financial aid. With deep and collaborative input from all of those involved in the PPLN project – including many parenting students themselves – this report offers policy recommendations for reducing or eliminating the substantial burdens that parenting students face while working to achieve their educational goals.

According to [data](#) from the National Center for Education Statistics, more than one in five college students (22 percent) in the United States are parenting students, representing more than four million college students with children. Parenting student data is not yet collected on a statewide basis in Pennsylvania, but if the Commonwealth's rate of parenting student enrollment is consistent with national trends, nearly 147,000 parenting students are enrolled here today.

A [report](#) from Ascend at the Aspen Institute dives deeper into parenting student demographics, and the PPLN encourages institutions to identify how many parenting students they serve as a step toward statewide data collection. Knowing how many parenting students are enrolled in higher education, and who they are, will help institutions and state and federal agencies develop policies and programs that support this population of students and dismantle systemic barriers to their success.

We are deeply grateful for the work and involvement of the PPLN advisory committee, member institutions, and parenting student advisory committee. The PA Parent Pathways project, while small in scope, has the potential to create best practices, educate and inform educational institutions, affect change in policy and practice, and make a positive difference in the lives of tens of thousands of Pennsylvanians.

We hope you consider the policy recommendations presented here and support the continuation of PPLN policy and program discussions to scale this work throughout the state so parenting students can succeed at achieving their goals.

Best regards,

Sara Goulet  
Catherine Stetler

# PENNSYLVANIA PARENT PATHWAYS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In 2022, through a grant from Ascend at the Aspen Institute, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) signed an agreement with The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University (“The Hope Center”) to develop a Parent Pathways Learning Network (PPLN).

Along with the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), DHS, and The Hope Center developed a program where six member colleges and universities have, through learning events, coaching and collaboration, developed parenting student implementation plans presentation to their respective schools’ leadership.

### GOALS OF THE PROJECT

- Inform stakeholders and state policymakers of the most significant barriers parenting students face to staying enrolled and completing their postsecondary education.
- Recommend state policy changes to support parenting students.
- Educate state policymakers and institutions on the need for collecting better data on parenting students and the challenges they face.
- For member schools to learn about and address the unique needs of parenting students and establish strategies to communicate the benefits and programs available to them at their institution and in the surrounding community.

To meet these goals, the project established the PPLN by selecting seven higher education institutions members through an application process - members include Alvernia University, Community College of Allegheny County, Mansfield University, Montgomery County Community College, Reading Area Community College, West Chester University, and Wilson College. Six institutions completed the afore mentioned implementation plan (included) to support parenting students.

The project also brought together a PPLN advisory committee comprised of various state agency and community advocates with specific expertise in resources that support the success of parenting students in college, namely food, child care, housing, and financial aid. Lastly, the team leaders from DHS, PDE, and The Hope Center sought and selected a group of parenting students to serve as advisors and the voice for parenting students across the commonwealth.

To help inform the Parenting Pathways Learning Network members, we held a series of four learning events on food, child care, housing, and financial aid, respectively. The advisory committee gathered additional exemplars in each of those four areas to discuss state, federal and community-specific programs focused on removing barriers. Events also included parenting students, who shared their greatest needs based on lived experience.

From these learning events, the advisory committee and parenting students developed this report, which is the culmination of months of planning, discussion, and convenings to prioritize the goals and suggested policy initiatives included here.



**When parenting students have the support they need to focus on their coursework, they create opportunities for themselves, their children, and society at large.**

DHS, PDE, and The Hope Center were fortunate to have the counsel and shared experience of Ascend at the Aspen Institute and five fellow grantees who shared planning and innovations during several convenings. These experiences helped us focus and move forward while considering some previously undiscovered ideas worthy of consideration in Pennsylvania.

Similarly, we brought the concept of convenings and counsel to our PPLN so learning network members could ask questions, seek counsel, and engage in peer-to-peer conversations via office hours, events, and one-on-one coaching sessions.

According to [research](#) published by Child Trends, when parenting students have the support they need to focus on their coursework, they create opportunities for themselves, their children, and society at large. Single mother students who finish their degrees have higher lifetime earnings and contribute more in taxes throughout their lifetimes than those who do not finish. For every dollar invested in services that support single mothers in school, the United States would get back approximately \$5 in increased tax contributions and decreased reliance on public assistance. Parents with higher levels of education also pass on many benefits to their children, spanning educational, health, and behavioral outcomes.

# RECOMMENDED POLICY CHANGES TO SUPPORT PARENTING STUDENT SUCCESS IN PENNSYLVANIA

The following policy recommendations are designed to support the success of parenting students in college. These recommendations emerged from PPLN's engagement with three primary stakeholder groups: the Advisory Committee, the Parenting Student Advisors Subcommittee, and PPLN member institutions.



## OVERARCHING STATE POLICY CHANGE PRIORITIES:

- [Collect data](#) on parenting status in higher education at the state and institutional level to enable disaggregated outcome data and better identify the needs of parenting students.
- Strengthen postsecondary data-sharing between state human service agencies, postsecondary institutions, and service providers to help refer students to public benefits and other resources.
- Invest in holistic student supports that prioritize parenting students and adopt a two-generational approach.
- Center the lived expertise of parenting students in statewide policymaking, including regulatory rule changes, public comment periods, legislative hearings, and agency advisory boards, and compensate them for this involvement.
- Send regular, customized, and timely communications to parenting students about local, state, and institutional resources that are available to help them succeed in higher education, including public benefits and programs related to food, housing, child care, and financial aid.

## FOOD SECURITY POLICY CHANGE PRIORITIES:

- Proactively communicate to students about their eligibility for two public benefits that support students' food security: the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):
  - › Send targeted communications about WIC to parenting students, including mothers, fathers, grandparents, and other caregivers of infants and young children;
  - › Send targeted communications about SNAP to parenting students, particularly given that parenting students are generally [exempt](#) from SNAP work requirements if caring for a dependent(s) under age 12, and including:
    - o [Expanded eligibility](#) for SNAP currently in place during the COVID-19 public health emergency ; and
    - o The opportunity for college students to receive SNAP and other benefits through the SNAP Education and Training Program (SNAP E&T), or programs deemed equivalent to SNAP E&T.
- DHS, DOH, and PDE should be responsible for communicating any SNAP/WIC changes and should coordinate with stakeholder groups for these communications.
- PA SNAP and WIC recommended changes:
  - › Allow required hours worked for SNAP receipt to be averaged across semester, versus requiring students to reach 20 hours of work each week, to align with parenting students' academic schedules and reduce administrative burden to access benefits.
  - › Make permanent the extended eligible items and other allowances made during the on-going formula crisis and expand WIC purchase-approved items and include those for infants and young children with dietary, nutrition, and/or religious needs without requiring a medical exception.
  - › Promote and expand SNAP E&T opportunities and benefits to parents as potential students and expand eligibility to PA public four-year school students. Note: The KEYS program is inclusive of four-year colleges per state law.
  - › Clarify state workforce and WIOA program supports and promote to current and potential postsecondary students.
  - › Allow college students to meet SNAP student eligibility criteria by virtue of enrollment in PA public institutions of higher education, including four-year schools.

## HOUSING SECURITY POLICY CHANGE PRIORITIES:

- Proactively communicate to parenting students about available housing benefits through targeted outreach from PA DHS/HFA, PASSHE Board of Governors, and campus student support services staff, including:
  - › Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) and Tenant-based Rental Assistance (TBRA) access and eligibility for parenting students, which is now a one-time assistance for first month's rent and security deposit and no longer a two-year program.
  - › Emergency housing supports, and coordinated points of entry for
    - o Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)
  - › [www.pahousingsearch.com](http://www.pahousingsearch.com); A free resource to help find a home that fits needs and budget. Property providers can list available apartments or homes at any time, which means the listings are current.
  - › Homeless Assistance Program - The Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) helps to assure that homelessness can be avoided, people who are homeless can find refuge and care and homeless and near-homeless clients are assisted in moving toward self-sufficiency. Available services through DHS include case management, rental assistance, bridge housing, emergency shelter and innovative supportive housing service (for creative solutions outside of HAP).
  - › PHARE program - PHARE was established by [Act 105 of 2010](#) (the "PHARE Act") to provide the mechanism by which certain allocated state or federal funds, as well as funds from other outside sources, would be used to assist with the creation, rehabilitation and support of affordable housing throughout the Commonwealth. The PHARE Act did not allocate any funding but did outline specific requirements that include preferences, considerations, match funding options and obligations to utilize a percentage of the funds to assist households below 50% of the median area income.
- Advocacy with Public Housing Authorities and housing stakeholders to promote partnerships such as the Family Scholar House model with potential to use Housing Choice Vouchers and Housing Trust Fund and tax credit programs to support parenting student-centered housing development and tenant rental assistance.
- Construct new housing that is open to students with families, and ensure campuses prioritize that type of housing for new construction.



## CHILD CARE POLICY CHANGE PRIORITIES:



22%



**More than one in five** college students in the United States are parenting students.

- Target communication of child care services and subsidies for pregnant and parenting students in partnership with county Early Learning Resource Centers, community-based organizations and postsecondary institutions.
- PA child care policy recommendations:
  - › Create or expand campus child care centers by leveraging federal funds such as CCDF, CCAMPIS, WIOA, or state recovery funds to increase the availability of affordable child care for parenting students.
  - › Prioritize expansion of child care options, including campus-based programs, Head Start programs, and family child care approved providers.
  - › Maximize campus child care investments to serve in a dual role for social work and early childhood education work-study and/or practicum hours needed for students' postsecondary credentials.
- Increase investments in child care sector and professional pathways to increase pay and benefits for postsecondary credentialed child care workers to receive a livable wage and sustainable career and sector pathway.
- Invest in culturally competent professional development for early learning professionals, including assistant teachers and paraeducators. Center data-informed strategies for child development practice, including supporting children with neural-divergence and disabilities, and collaborating with parents.



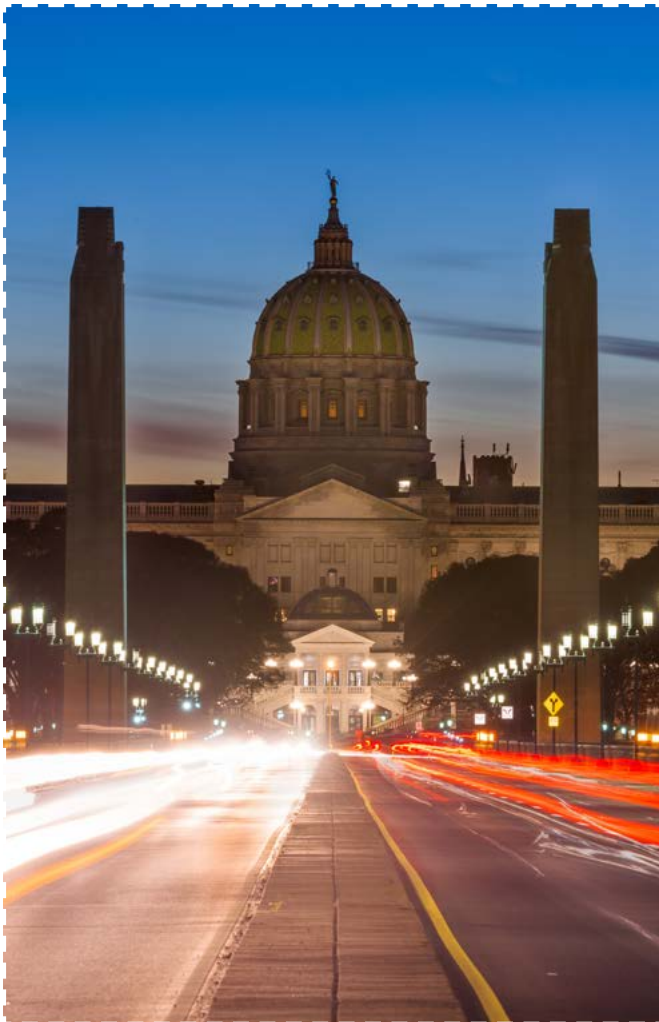
## FINANCIAL AID POLICY CHANGE PRIORITIES:



- Provide transparent communication and calculation of student financial aid at all institutions of higher education in Pennsylvania, including:
  - › Requiring disclosure of the full cost of attendance directly to students, including both direct costs such as tuition and fees, as well as indirect expenses such as food, housing, child care, and transportation between home and work.
  - › Requiring institutions to adopt the [best practice](#) of listing the net cost to students that includes the items included above as the full cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships.
- PA State Financial Aid policy change recommendations:
  - › Establish a state-supported [emergency aid program](#) with a permanent funding source that prioritizes parenting students and helps them meet unexpected costs and remain enrolled in higher education.
  - › Ensure all students are eligible for the emergency aid program, not just students who file a FAFSA or already receive financial aid.
- Reform the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standard that [limits needed flexibilities](#) for parenting students to respond to the life events of their household and their children. This could include:
  - › Provide greater flexibility in state and institutional grant aid programs that go beyond federal SAP standards to ensure students continue to receive state aid even while not making SAP.
  - › Expand criteria for appealing the loss of federal aid by including extenuating circumstances such as [homelessness](#), food insecurity, parenting a dependent child and more.
  - › Eliminate the GPA requirement to renew and maintain state financial aid eligibility.
  - › Include homelessness/housing insecurity as immediate grounds for SAP appeal which other states have done
- Supplement (within state's control) the federal [TANF](#) funding to provide increased need-based cash assistance and supportive service programs to reach more parenting students and enroll more parents to pursue credentials that can secure family-sustaining employment.
- Increase lifetime limit for special allowances and supportive services (to \$4,000) to account for current market costs for course materials, transportation, and other eligible expenses that occur every year of enrollment for parenting students.

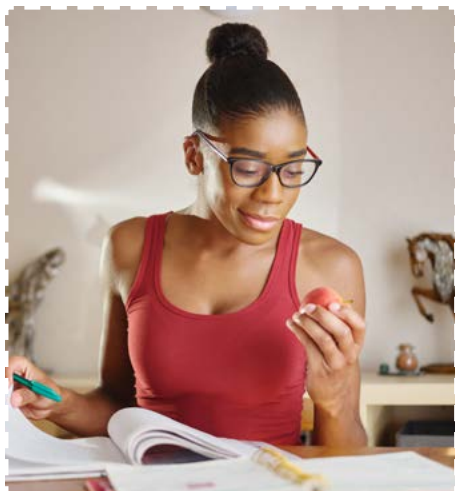
## FEDERAL AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS FOR CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION, SYSTEMS CHANGE AND INVESTMENT FOR PENNSYLVANIA PARENTING STUDENTS:

- Workforce program intersections, alignments and opportunities for reform that center a two-generation approach to meeting the needs of students, parents, and families in the rapidly changing higher education and labor market landscape.
- Medical and mental health basic needs supports for parenting students and potential enrollees.
- Transportation to provide access to grocery stores, housing, child care, and employment.
- Student support services, financial aid, and programming for parenting students pursuing a graduate degree.
- PA Housing Legislative and/or Regulatory changes
  - › Maximize state authority to prioritize and extend LIHTC eligibility to parents enrolled in college, including less than full-time and when both parents are enrolled, and/or not legally married.
  - › Provide incentives or matching funds for statewide housing authorities to enter into partnerships with colleges to offer vouchers and/or subsidies for low-cost housing that prioritize parents. Exemplar models include the Family Scholar House model launching soon with PPLN members in Pittsburgh.
  - › Leverage US HUD financing.
  - › Leverage HEERF and state recovery funds for student-centered partnerships.
  - › Replicate and expand initiatives like Community College of Philadelphia and PHA Shared Housing Partnership to invest funding in homeless or housing insecure students for short-term housing, prioritizing former foster youth and students with families.
  - › Include evidence-based investments for additional supportive services demonstrated to support parenting students' success such as child care, laundry and storage services, technology, free or reduced meal plans, and case management.



# POSITIVE CHANGE FOR THE WIN

During the course of this project, several relevant policy changes were implemented.



## PA HUNGER-FREE CAMPUS:

**Passed the PA Hunger-Free Campus initiative:** Pennsylvania was added to the growing list of states providing a bundle of resources and supports for institutions to tackle food insecurity on their campuses. The initiative is educating a broad range of stakeholders on the crisis of food insecurity for college students, the disproportionate rate of food insecurity among parenting students and their children, and opportunities for state-supported policy interventions.



## SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

**Broad-based categorical eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was expanded from 160% to 200% of the federal poverty line:** The higher threshold allows for more Pennsylvania parenting students with low-incomes, and more working families, to receive food assistance.



## FINDING YOUR WAY IN PA

**PDE announced the creation of Finding Your Way in PA:** This Pennsylvania-based mobile and desktop app, developed by the Center for Schools and Communities, connects students and families experiencing homelessness with local services and resources. Postsecondary students can find resources to address housing insecurity, food insecurity, mental health, and other needs. Campus staff can also use the app to guide students to the relevant resources. This allows for fewer parenting students to experience homelessness or home insecurity.

# POSITIVE CHANGE FOR THE WIN

Continued



## CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES

**Expanding income eligibility to 300% for renewal of child care subsidies** that allowed for re-determination to address the cliff effect. This allows for people to remain eligible for child care subsidies even if their income increases.



## KEYSTONE EDUCATION YIELDS SUCCESS

**The KEYS (Keystone Education Yields Success) Program focus**, support and cross-sector coordination of resources and support for parenting students accessing TANF and SNAP.

## FINDING YOUR WAY IN PA

**New 55 PA Code 3042 Child Care Subsidy regulations:** These rules have been modified and are in final review with the Legislative Committees. They will then return to the Independent Regulatory Review Committee. The modifications prioritize parenting students as a target population served by federal Child Care and Development Funds (CCDF) and allocate funds specifically for parenting students in partnership with local early learning resource agencies and postsecondary institutions. The modified regulations also alleviate additional eligibility requirements imposed on parenting students seeking child care subsidies, such as:

- Degree limitations and requirements;
- Work requirements; and
- Qualifying institution restrictions.



# OTHER PROJECT OUTCOMES

## LEARNING NETWORK EVENTS AND EXEMPLARS

Each learning network event included representatives of state government and community organizations with expertise (as “exemplars”) in the event subject. Our goal for each event was to listen to parenting student advisors’ lived experience specific to the event topic, and corresponding input from exemplars about how barriers could be potentially removed.

**April 28:**  
Food  
Security

Participating exemplars: representatives of OIM, Community Legal Services (Philadelphia), Swipe out Hunger

**May 26:**  
Housing

Participating exemplars: PHFA, CHN Housing Partners, Tacoma Housing Authority, Families Forward Philadelphia

**June 23:**  
Child Care

Participating exemplars: State agency representatives from OCDEL, OIM

**June 28:**  
Financial  
Aid

Participating exemplars: PHEAA (Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency), Community Justice Project

“  
Our goal for each event was to listen to  
parenting student advisors’ lived experience.  
”

# PARENT PATHWAYS LEARNING NETWORK (PPLN)

## PARTICIPANTS: PARTICIPATING HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

- Alvernia University
  - Community College of Allegheny County
  - Mansfield University
  - Montgomery County Community College
  - Reading Area Community College
  - West Chester University
  - Wilson College\*
- \*Over time, Wilson College's original staff applicant took on additional duties and was no longer able to participate, leaving the PPLN with six active member schools.

## NETWORK ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### **PA Department Human Services**

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- Catherine Stetler, Special Assistant to the Secretary
- Sara Goulet, Special Advisor to the Secretary
- Stephanie Meyer, Housing specialist and Special Assistant to the Secretary
- Lexi Deisenroth, Executive Assistant, Office of Income Maintenance
- Karen Grimm-Thomas, Director of External Relations, Office of Child Development and Early Learning

### **The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice at Temple University**

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- Paula Umaña, Director of Institutional Engagement
- Joshua Williams, Practitioner-Researcher
- Ali Caccavella, (former) Senior Learning Specialist
- Queena Hoang, (former) Program Manager, Education Programs & Operations
- David Koppisch, (former) Associate Director of Community Engagement
- Marissa Meyers, (former) Practitioner-Researcher
- Rosalinda Ortiz, (former) Practitioner-Researcher

### **PA Department of Health**

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- Ellen Fuller, WIC

### **Pennsylvania Department of Education**

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- Erin Donohoe, Policy Specialist
- Victoria Ballerini, (former) Executive Assistant, Office of Postsecondary and Higher Education
- Lynette Kuhn, Division Chief, Division of Higher Education, Access, and Equity
- Kimberly McCurdy, Director, Bureau of Postsecondary and Adult Education

### **Governor's Office of Advocacy and Reform**

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- Maryann McEvoy, Pennsylvania's Child Advocate

### **Housing**

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- Lisa Scott, Housing services representative, PA Housing Finance Agency
- Danielle Rudy, Supportive housing officer, PA Housing Finance Agency

### **Health Equity**

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- David Saunders, Director, Office of Health Equity, Pennsylvania Department of HealthWorkforce
- James Martini, Exec. Director, Pennsylvania State Workforce Development Board, PA Department of Labor & Industry

# PARENT PATHWAYS LEARNING NETWORK (PPLN)

Continued

## PARENTING STUDENT ADVISORS

Parenting Student Advisors were outspoken advocates for the needs and opportunities of parenting students' success. Ideal candidates were those ready to strive to engage across stakeholder audiences, including state policymakers, institutional leaders, and other parenting student experts. Parenting Student Advisors recognized the diverse experience and needs of parenting students across racial, ethnic, and gender identities, and were committed to advancing policies and programs that dismantle systemic inequities in support of success for all students and their families.

Under The Hope Center's leadership, Parenting Student Advisors devoted up to 15 hours per month to the development of an advisory committee and subcommittee of parenting students to inform state and institutional leaders on policies and systems-change needed for parenting students' post-secondary success. Parenting Student Advisors received professional development on collective impact strategy and higher-ed systems-change, and a competitive stipend at roughly \$35/hour for their time over a period of nine months.

Two PSA chairs were paid for their work via the grant:

### **Rawl Callender**

Rawl Callender attends Kutztown University. His long-term goal is to become a lawyer. Rawl brings to light the experiences that define many of today's college students. His responsibilities include balancing a 40-plus hour work week, along with attending college classes Monday-Friday, and maintaining his personal life as a father to a newborn. Due to his work schedule and personal and parenting life his sleep schedule is not like that of a regular student. This causes him to lose focus in his morning classes and maybe miss classes to attend work or watch his newborn. Missing classes negatively impacts his financial aid. Rawl believes that there needs to be better communication between professors and parenting students to accommodate their personal lives and educational goals. Rawl also believes that offering scholarships, dining passes, and other forms of financial assistance can lessen the load towards parenting students. This will alleviate many of the hardships parenting students face while in college.

### **Christina Hasaan**

Christina Hasaan recently graduated with her bachelor's degree from Temple University. She is now employed by Swipe Out Hunger, a national nonprofit that partners with college campuses to end student hunger. Christina discusses the difficulties she has faced as a full-time mother while attending college. She says that parenting students need full wrap-around support to take care of their basic needs. This support will allow a parenting student like her to focus on her schoolwork and excel in her classes. Christina believes that colleges should have representatives/advocates on campus for parenting students to help them navigate their personal lives and college workload on a daily basis. She hopes that her story can help other students like her continue their college education. Christina also hopes that her story can bring first-hand insight to policymakers on what parenting students need.

# PARENT PATHWAYS LEARNING NETWORK (PPLN)

Continued

## PARENTING STUDENT ADVISORS SUBCOMMITTEE

Subcommittee members were compensated with gift cards via the grant and The Hope Center:

- Shaina Sweeney- Alvernia University
- Elizabeth Merin- Alvernia University
- Icylee Basketbill- Chestnut Hill College
- Jo-Ellen Bloom- Alvernia University
- Syed Ahmed- Delaware County Community College
- Aliyah Schaffer- La Salle University
- Carolina Hidalgo-Ahmed- Millersville University
- Talayia Gulotta- Alvernia University

## ROLES OF LEADERSHIP PARTNERS: DHS, PDE, AND THE HOPE CENTER

DHS served as project coordinator, facilitating all meetings and events and working directly with The Hope Center staff on planning and coordinating communications. DHS staff served as exemplars on all PPLN events and helped to write this report. Their expertise and input were invaluable.

PDE advisory committee members served as key exemplars for all PPLN events and guides for the world of postsecondary education. PDE led on policy and programs pertinent to parenting students and communicated with postsecondary leadership.

The Hope Center led the coordination of the parenting student advisors, communications with DHS and PDE, and with the exemplars for each event. The Hope Center also created and updated a [PPLN website](#) and served as coaching and staff for office hours for learning network member schools.







**pennsylvania**

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES