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December 28, 2023

**TO:** Governor JB Pritzker  
The Honorable Don Harmon, Senate President  
The Honorable Dan McConchie, Senate Minority Leader  
The Honorable Emanuel "Chris" Welch, Speaker of the House  
The Honorable Jim Durkin, House Minority Leader

**FROM:** Ginger Ostro, Executive Director

**RE:** Student Parent Data Collection Act Report

I am pleased to submit to you a systematic and statewide report on student parents and their academic outcomes.

Under the Student Parent Data Collection Act (110 ILCS 149), the Illinois Board of Higher Education worked in conjunction with the Illinois public universities and advocates to develop an operational definition, execute a workable data collection plan, and, with this document, annually report information on this student group.

Please contact Dr. Eric Lichtenberger at [lichtenberger@ibhe.org](mailto:lichtenberger@ibhe.org), if you have any questions about this report.

Enclosure

**CC:** Illinois State Library  
Legislative Research Unit

# STUDENT PARENT DATA COLLECTION ACT ANNUAL REPORT



Illinois Board of Higher Education  
December 2023

## ILLINOIS BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Introduction

This report includes systematic and statewide reporting on student parents and their academic outcomes, and for the second consecutive year, includes information uniformly collected across all 12 of the Illinois public universities for academic year 2022-23.

Under the [Student Parent Data Collection Act \(110 ILCS 149\)](#), the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) continued to work in conjunction with the Illinois public universities and advocates to refine the operational definition, execute a workable data collection plan, and report information on this traditionally underserved and underreported student group. The report fulfills IBHE's mandated annual reporting requirement and provides evidence of the full compliance of the Illinois public universities in working with IBHE staff and providing all required information on student parents. The report also includes baseline information on one of the key support services provided to student parents, namely the availability of on-campus or university affiliated childcare.

## Key Findings

- Student parents, as a group, were comparatively comprised of more women, more adult learners, and more part-time students than non-parents. Also, proportionately more student parents received grants through the state's need-based aid program, Monetary Award Program (MAP).
- Student parents, as a group, were comprised of proportionally fewer Asian students and significantly more African American students compared to non-parents and non-FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) filers.
- There was wide variation in the concentration and the number of student parents across the 12 Illinois public universities. The three largest Illinois public universities – the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Illinois State University (ISU), and the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC),– served the smallest concentrations of student parents.
- All of the Illinois public universities, with the exception of Eastern Illinois University (EIU), operated or had an affiliated childcare center that was available for use by student parents in academic year 2022-23.
- Collecting aggregate information on student parents sourced partially from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) was an appropriate method.
- Student parents were retained at lower rates and had lower grade point averages (GPA) relative to their non-parent counterparts. However, retention and grade point average were both measured using traditionally defined cohorts of first-time, full-time undergraduates and, therefore, only included a limited number of student parents. In future iterations, once student parent status is collected at the student-level, the measures will be expanded to include other groups, such as transfer students and part-time students.

There is more work to be done specific to how Illinois public universities provide services to student parents in a coordinated effort to help them succeed. To facilitate that work, the following should occur:

- IBHE should continue its plans to update its data collection processes to accommodate the collection of the student parent and marital status information at the student-level.
- In future iterations of this report, the outcomes information (retention, grade point average, credit accumulation, etc.) should be calculated for part-time students and perhaps other students who are not members of traditional first-time, full-time cohorts. The collection of student-level information on student parents will facilitate this work.

In analyzing the baseline information, there continues to be wide variation in the number of student parents being served across the 12 Illinois public universities.

## How Many Undergraduate Student Parents are Enrolled at Illinois Public Universities?

Across the Illinois public universities, 2.8% of undergraduates were student parents as measured by Federal Application Student Financial Aid (FAFSA) responses with wide variation. This was slightly lower than the 2.9% that was reported the prior year, academic year 2021-22. More than one out of every five of the undergraduates (22%) at Chicago State University (CSU) were student parents, and Governors State University (GSU) had the second highest proportion at 15.9%. University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) was the other Illinois public university with at least 10% of its undergraduates identified as student parents. At the three largest Illinois public universities (UIUC, UIC, and ISU) only small proportions of undergraduate students were parents. Only 0.2% of the undergraduate students at UIUC were student parents, 1.1% at UIS, and 1.3% at UIC.

Figure 1: Distribution of Undergraduates by Student Parental Status

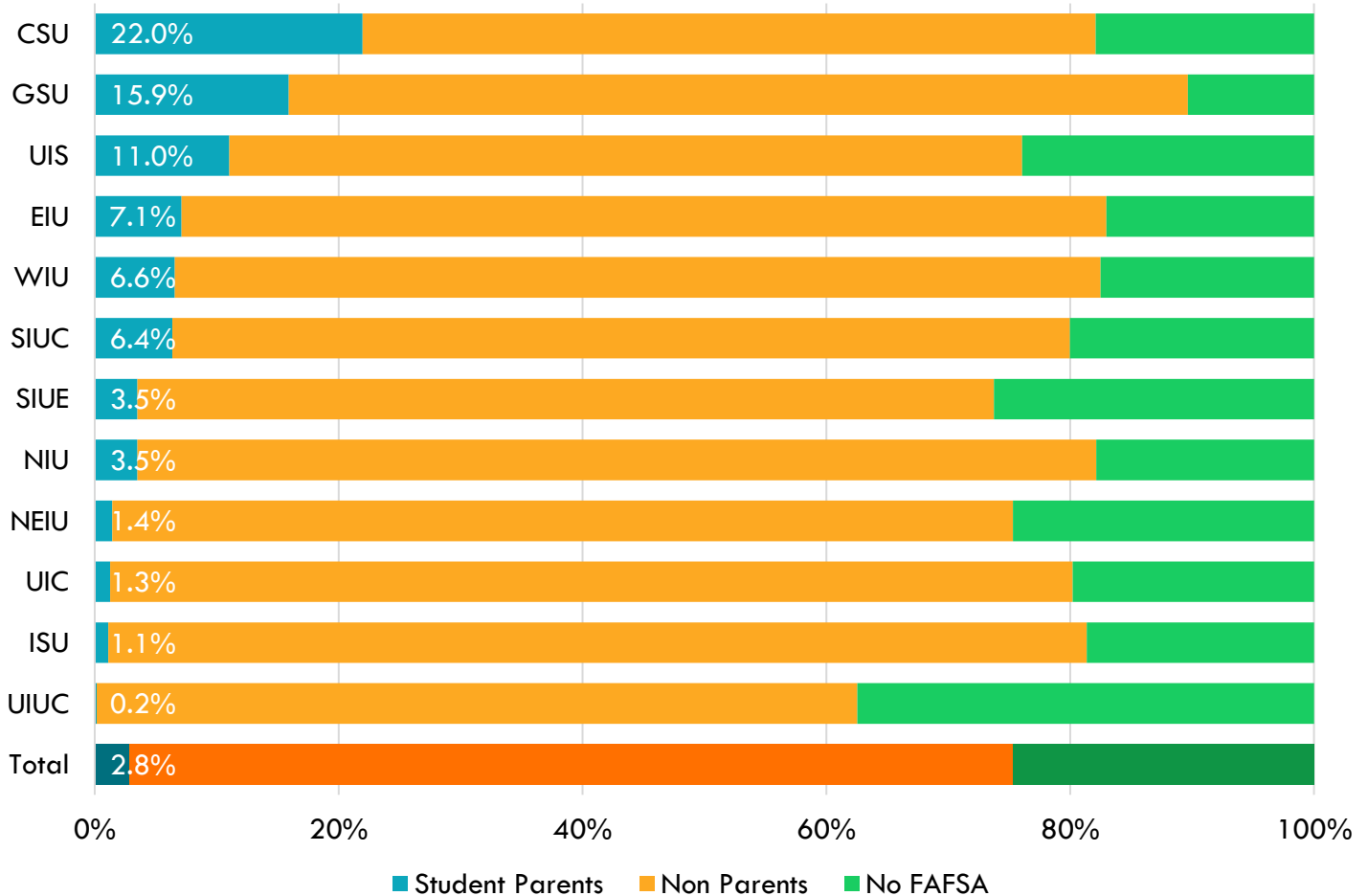
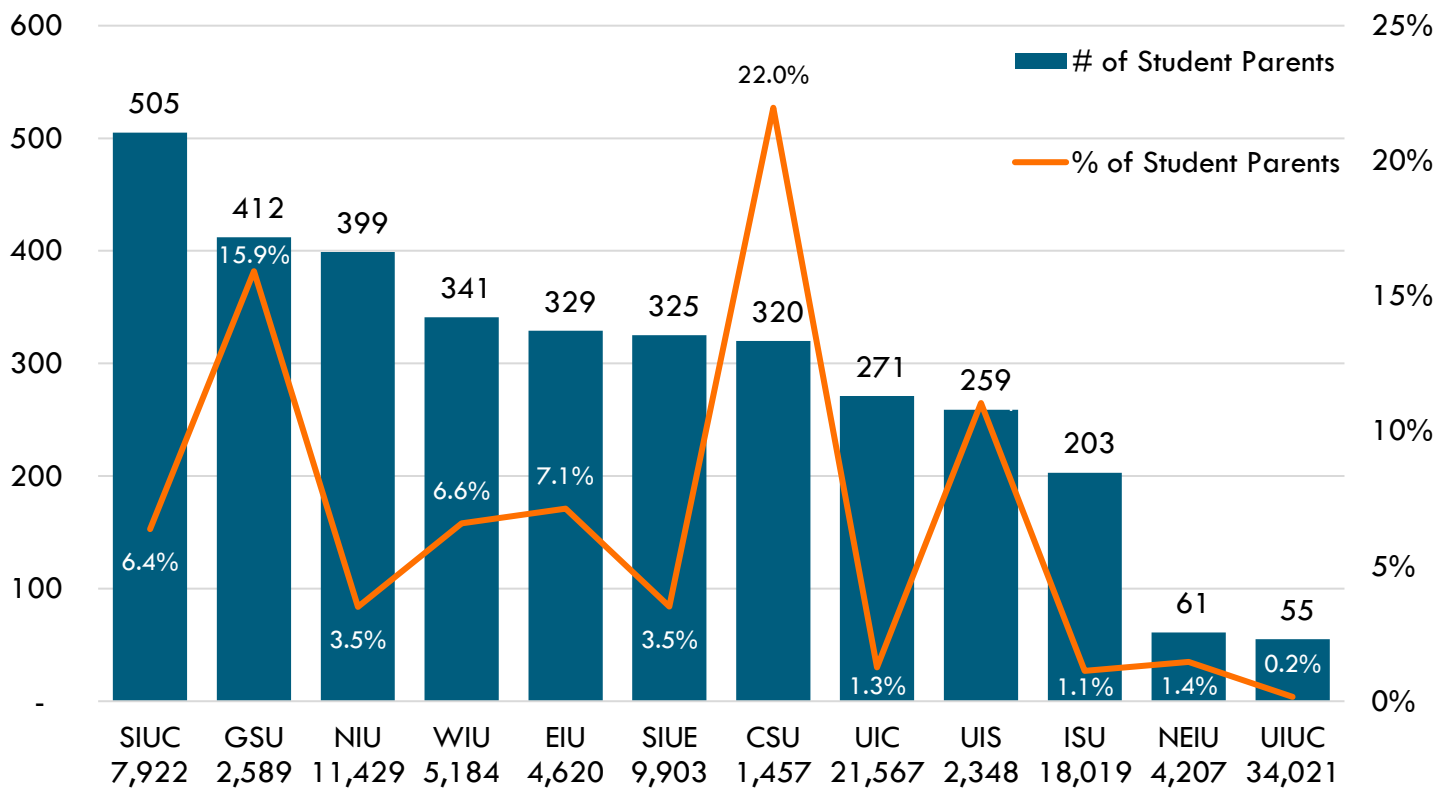


Figure 2 provides information on the number of student parents at each of the Illinois public universities relative to the overall number of undergraduate students. Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) had the greatest number of undergraduate student parents across the Illinois public universities at 505, followed by GSU at 412, and Northern Illinois University (NIU) at 399. UIUC had the fewest student parents at 55 followed by Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) at 61. GSU was among the Illinois public universities with both the highest number and the highest concentration of student parents. UIUC and NEIU were among the public universities with the lowest number and lowest concentrations of undergraduate student parents. Total undergraduate enrollment for each Illinois public university is provided for additional context on the size of the overall undergraduate student body.

Figure 2: Number of Undergraduate Student Parents by Illinois Public University

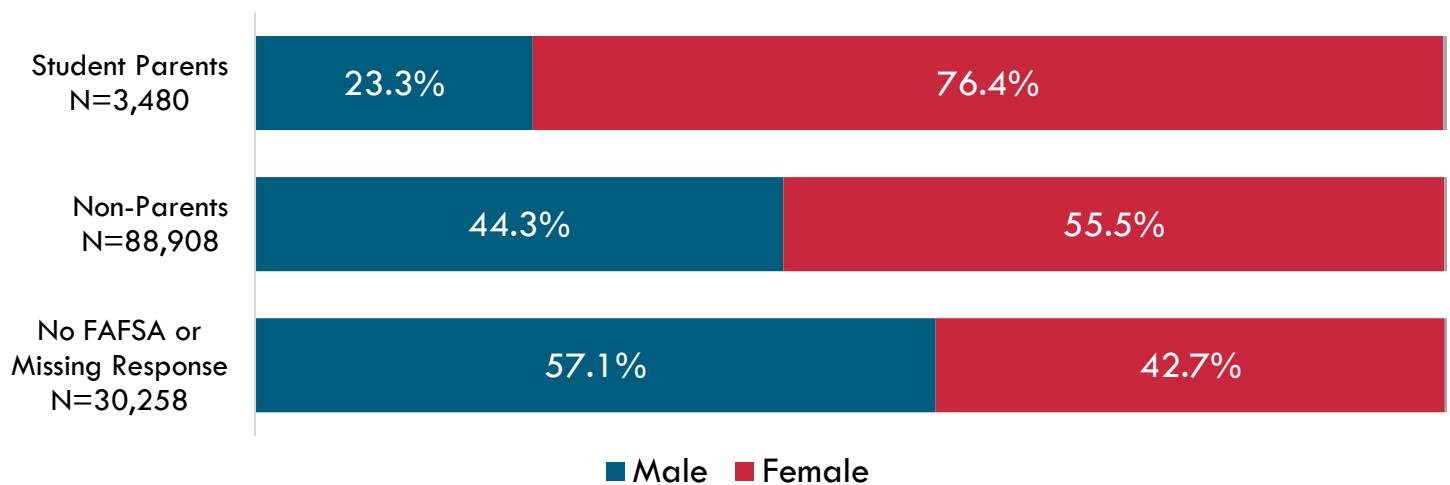


In analyzing the academic year 2022-23 information, IBHE staff found student parents were distinctly different from the other non-parent comparison groups on some key characteristics.

### What is the Gender Distribution of Student Parents?

Across the 12 Illinois public universities, there were 3,480 student parents, 88,908 non-parents, and an additional 30,258 individuals without a FAFSA or with a missing response on the FAFSA, so their parental status could not be determined. As previously noted, student parents comprised 2.8% of all undergraduate students at Illinois public universities in academic year 2022-23. As a group, student parents at Illinois public universities were largely female. A much higher percentage of student parents were female relative to the other two groups: non-parents and the non-FAFSA filers. As shown in Figure 3, over three-quarters of student parents were female, as opposed to 55.5% of non-parents and 42.7% of non-FAFSA filers.

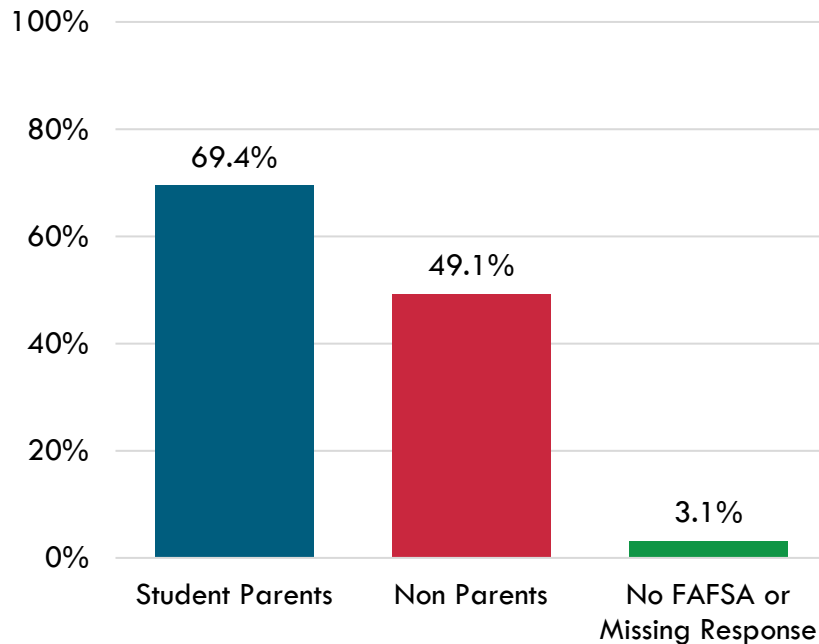
Figure 3: Student Parent Status by Gender



## How Many Student Parents Receive Financial Aid?

Higher proportions of student parents received Monetary Award Program (MAP) funding relative to the other two groups. In most instances, filing a FAFSA is required to receive the state of Illinois' MAP grant. As depicted in Figure 4, nearly 70% of student parents received MAP awards compared to one-half of the non-parents, along with a small number of the non-FAFSA filers (3.1%).

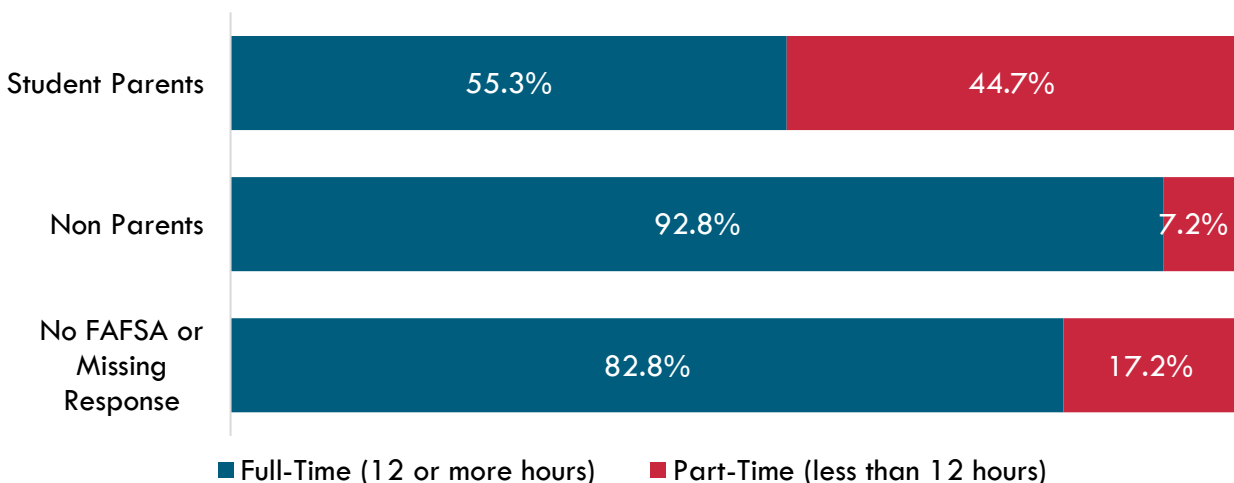
Figure 4: MAP Receipt and Student Parent Status



## What is the Enrollment Intensity of Student Parents?

As shown in Figure 5, 44.7% student parents were enrolled part-time (less than 12 credit hours), which was significantly higher than the other two groups. In contrast, the overwhelming majority of non-parents (92.8%) and non-FAFSA filers (82.8%) were full-time students.

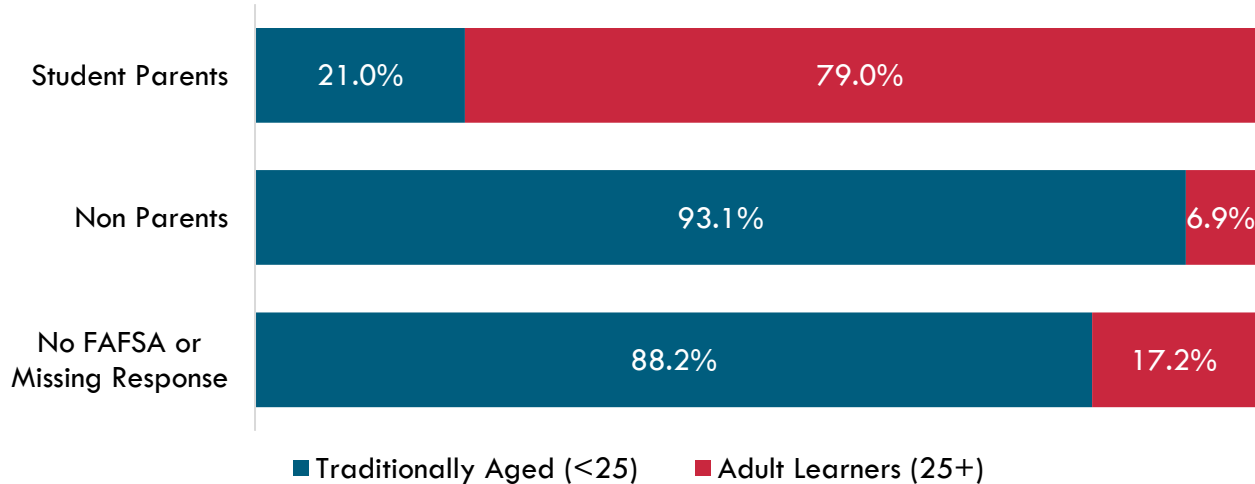
Figure 5: Enrollment Intensity by Student Parent Status



## How Many Student Parents are Adult Learners?

Student parents enrolling at Illinois public universities are overwhelmingly adult learners - nearly four out of every five (79%) student parents were 25 years of age or older, which was the opposite pattern of non-parents and undergraduates not filing a FAFSA. As shown in Figure 6, among the other two groups, roughly nine out of every 10 group members were traditionally-aged college students or those younger than 25 years old.

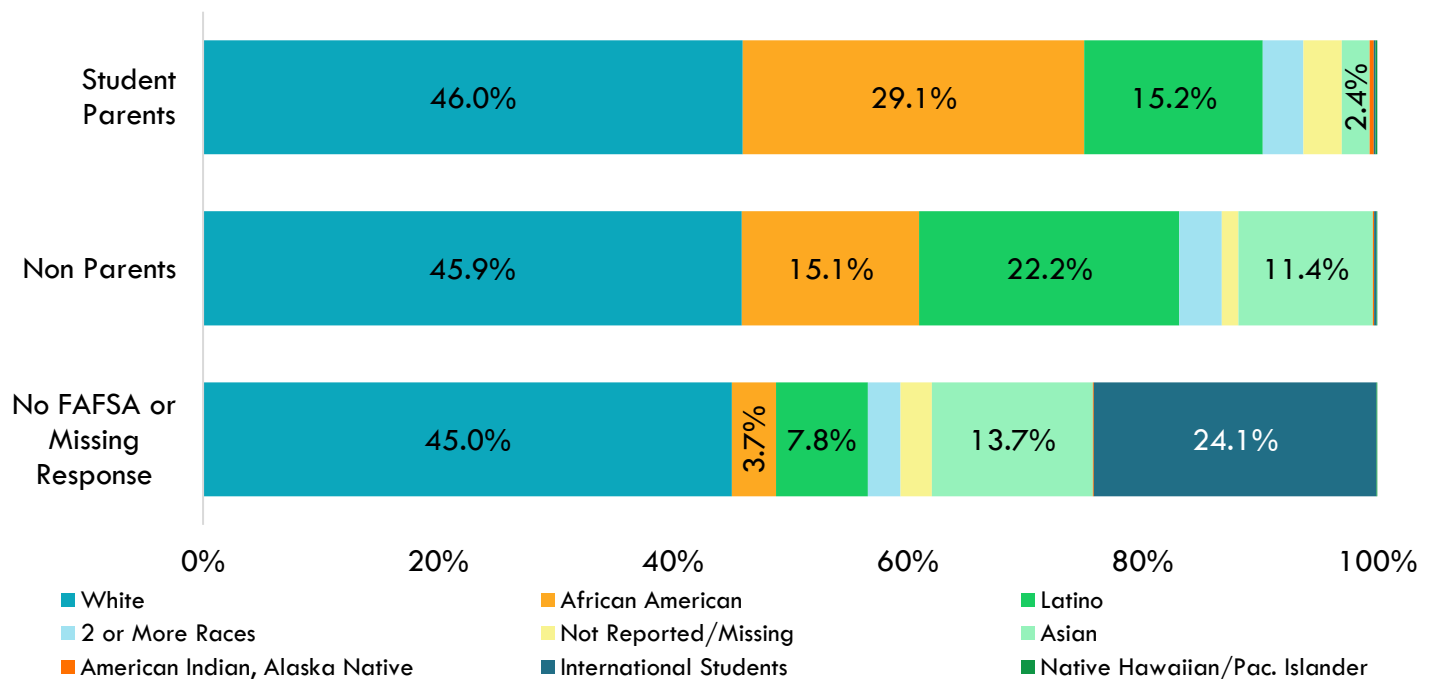
Figure 6: Age by Student Parent Status



## What is the Race/Ethnicity Distribution of Student Parents?

The race/ethnicity distribution was somewhat different across the three groups. The student parent group was comprised of proportionally fewer Asian students and significantly more African American students compared to non-parents and non-FAFSA filers. As illustrated in Figure 7, the student parent group had twice the proportion of African Americans relative to the non-parent group and eight times the proportion as non-FAFSA filers. The non-parent group had the highest proportion of Latino students, while the non-FAFSA filers, as a group, had the highest proportion of international students. As in almost all cases, international students do not qualify for Pell grants and, therefore, would not typically file the FAFSA.

Figure 7: Race/Ethnicity by Student Parent Status



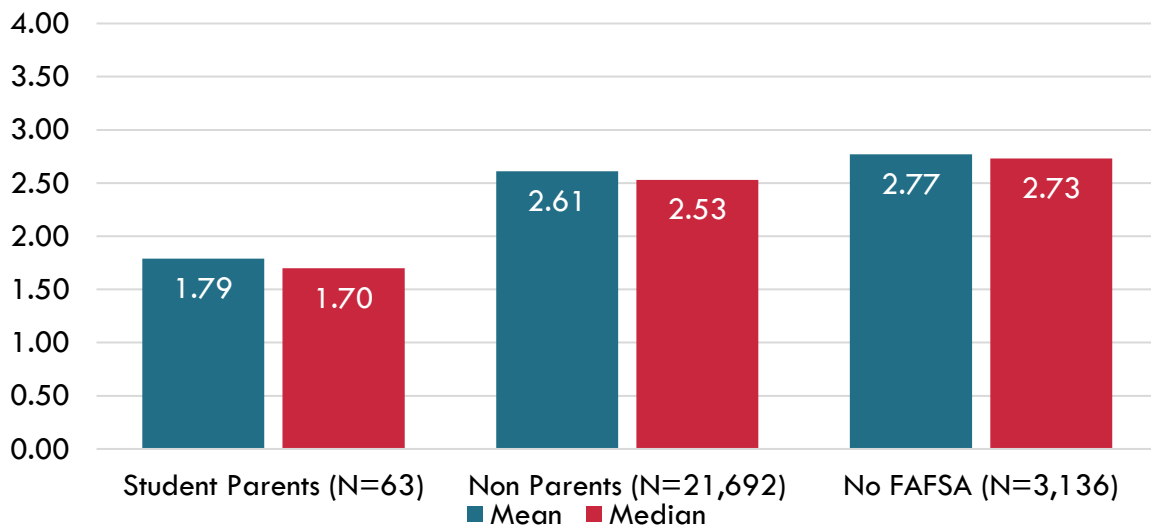


## What are the Academic Outcomes of Student Parents?

The following measures are based on first-time, full-time undergraduate students and serve two purposes. The information points to potential academic struggles of student parents as a group and, at the same time, demonstrates how using traditional cohort measures focusing on first-time, full-time students misses a large proportion of this population, as there were only 63 first-time, full-time student parents enrolled in the fall semester of academic year 2022-23 across all 12 Illinois public universities. This suggests the need for additional outcome measures that focus on part-time and transfer students to better capture success measures for this non-traditional student population.

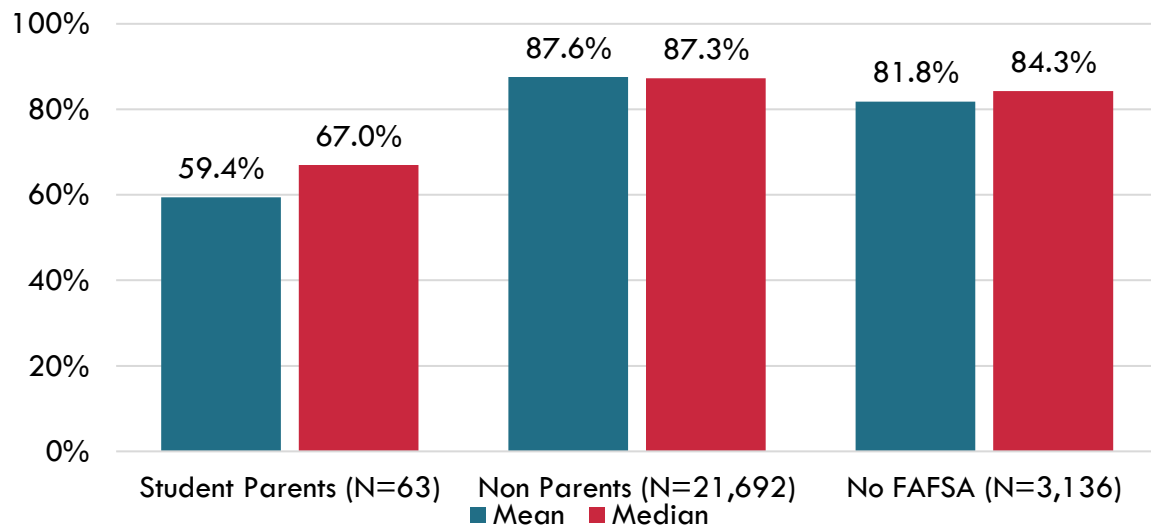
Student parents, among the first-time, full-time cohort, were academically outperformed by their peers. The mean and median grade point averages across the 12 Illinois public universities for student parents were significantly lower than the parallel measures for non-parents and undergraduate students not filing the FAFSA.

Figure 8: GPA by Student Parent Status for Illinois Public Universities



Student parents, among the first-time, full-time cohort, generally had lower retention rates than their peers. Fall to spring retention was significantly lower for student parents than their counterparts in the non-parent group and the undergraduate non-FAFSA filers. Once again, the number of individuals in the first-time, full-time population, which is traditionally used for tracking retention, was small among student parents.

Figure 9: Fall to Spring Retention by Student Parent Status for Illinois Public Universities



## How Many Children of Student Parents are Served by On-Campus Childcare Centers?

All the Illinois public universities have a childcare center or an otherwise affiliated childcare center except EIU. CSU opened its on-campus childcare center and started providing childcare services in the spring semester of academic year 2021-2022.

Although all the centers served children of student parents, most of the children being served were not children of currently enrolled students. SIUC served the most children (based on fall semester) by a considerable margin at over 261, followed by UIUC (130), GSU (146), and NIU (117). Based on fall semester information, NIU served the greatest number of children of student parents (101) and had the highest proportion of children of student parents (86.3%).

Table 1: Children Served at Childcare Facilities by Illinois Public University

Institution	# of Children Served at Childcare Facilities		# of Children of Student Parents Served	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
IL Public University*				
CSU	0	12	0	1
GSU	146	132	8	6
ISU	18	19	4	5
NEIU	57	58	5	7
NIU	117	123	101	103
SIUC	261	276	28	31
SIUE	50	76	15	17
UIC	25	36	6	8
UIS	63	66	4	4
UIUC	130	130	37	37
WIU	24	25	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>224</b>

\*EIU reported not having an early childhood center on campus during the reporting period

### Data Collection & Methodology

The timing of the passage of the legislation did not provide IBHE with enough time to socialize the new collection to capture the student-parent information at the student level for academic year 2021-22, nor did it afford the Illinois public universities enough time to implement new procedures on campus to systematically capture new information on student parents for academic year 2021-22. Operationalizing what it means to be a student parent, analyzing the landscape to determine what other states and entities are doing in this space, and systematically collecting this information at the student level while ensuring fidelity to the definition could not be done before the fall semester of academic year 2021-22.

Nonetheless, throughout the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022, IBHE convened the public university institutional research (IR) directors to determine the best path forward in light of the timing issue. One of the core principles that IBHE employs specific to data collection is to rely on existing data sources that are uniformly collected when and where possible. During these meetings between IBHE and the public university IR directors and in subsequent meetings with the Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC) research staff, it was determined that FAFSA could be used as a potential source of information, at least temporarily, to meet some of the reporting requirements set forth in the [Student Parent Data Collection Act \(110 ILCS 149\)](#). ISAC considers this group of students independent with dependents.

The FAFSA question was specific to the prior academic year and included the following language: *Do you now have or will you have children who will receive more than half of their support from you between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2022 (Y/N)?*

The information is collected during an established process with potentially high stakes results as the information provided on the FAFSA is used to determine eligibility for Pell grants. Therefore, it would be in the student's best interest to provide accurate and complete information.

Also, the information reported through the FAFSA is updated annually, which aligns with the dynamic nature of what it means to be a student parent. In other words, being a student parent is not static and may change as someone progresses through their undergraduate academic program. To maintain Pell eligibility, an undergraduate and eligible student would be required to file the FAFSA each year.

The Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) has been collecting single-parent status for Perkins reporting purposes and opted to slightly alter an existing definition to meet the new reporting requirements and to require it of all students. ICCB utilized the following codes: *0 – Not a Parent (nor a pregnant individual); 1 – Single Parent (includes single pregnant individuals); 2 – Married Parent (includes married pregnant individuals); 9 – Unknown (For use only for reporting FY 2022 data and should be used sparingly)*. For fiscal year 2022 reporting, ICCB allowed institutions to report unknown, as this was largely new, and has plans to remove the unknown option for fiscal year 2023.

Due to timing issues, IBHE was not able to immediately implement the same approach as ICCB as IBHE did not have a similar preexisting variable and collection it could adapt. Therefore, IBHE took a different approach in meeting this legislative mandate, which involves the use of aggregate information partially sourced from the FAFSA.

There are some inherent limitations associated with using the FAFSA that should be noted: 1) it is limited to individuals who file the FAFSA and, therefore, would not include international students who are not eligible for federal financial aid, DACA students, and wealthier students who do not file the FAFSA because they assume that they would not qualify for federal financial aid; 2) it is also limited to undergraduate students and would, therefore, not include graduate nor professional students; and 3) the questions on the FAFSA may be streamlined, and the student parent questions could potentially be eliminated as the FAFSA is updated in future iterations.

After discussions with the Illinois public university institutional research and planning directors and national advocates and experts, IBHE decided to take a flexible and iterative approach to meet the reporting requirements set forth in the legislation as described below.

Year 1 (academic year 2021-22, reflect in the first report): IBHE collected FAFSA-derived survey information from the Illinois public universities with the legislatively required disaggregation and outcome metrics. The way the information was being collected would have identified any potential limitations of using the FAFSA as the source. The general idea was that the information provided to IBHE by the Illinois public universities would include information on the FAFSA coverage among undergraduates. This, in turn, would provide IBHE some insight into using the FAFSA as a temporary solution.

Year 2 (academic year 2022-23, reflected in the current report): IBHE continued to collect FAFSA-derived survey information from the Illinois public universities in an aggregate report as plans were developed and executed to collect the same information at the student-level in future years.

Year 3 (academic year 2023-24 and beyond): The public universities will be required to provide IBHE with the student parent and marital status information from the FAFSA at the student-level through IBHE's Illinois Higher Education Information System (IHEIS) enrollment collection.

IBHE was required to consult with advocacy groups as it developed its plans to operationalize and collect information on student parents. Dr. Eric Lichtenberger, deputy director of information management and research at IBHE, met with Sarah Labadie, associate director of policy for Women Employed, on February 8, 2022 to

discuss IBHE's initial plans for responding to the legislation and defining "student parent." This meeting led to additional meetings with national policy experts and advocates.

As previously reported, Dr. Lichtenberger (IBHE) met with three national experts from the Urban Institute – Theresa Anderson, Kristi Johns, and Nathan Sick – on May 9, 2022. Dr. Lichtenberger also met with a panel of national experts on June 10, 2022 which included the following individuals that have been identified as leaders from their respective states: John Hamman, chief analytics and insights officer, Montgomery College, Maryland; Mary Ann DeMario, specialist, institutional research, Monroe Community College, New York; and David Troutman, the associate vice chancellor and chief data officer of institutional research and advanced analytics for the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis (OIRA) at The University of Texas System.

Dr. Lichtenberger is currently serving on the Board of Advisors for the Data-to-Action Campaign for Parenting Students, which afforded IBHE the opportunity to continue consulting with leading experts and advocates from around the county. The first meeting of the Board of Advisors took place on October 3, 2023.

Throughout the fall and spring semesters of academic year 2022-23, Dr. Lichtenberger continued to meet with public university institutional research and planning directors to receive feedback on the evolution of the student parent collection from aggregate report to student-level information.

Dr. Lichtenberger also continued to meet with Nathan Wilson, deputy director for research and information technology at ICCB, in academic year 2022-23 to discuss potential alignment between ICCB and IBHE approaches.

### **Compliance with Section 15**

All the Illinois public universities were in full compliance with Section 15 by sake of reporting the headcount usage of on-campus and university-affiliated childcare facilities in the fall and spring semesters in addition to the number of children of currently enrolled students being served. The submission of this information by the Illinois public universities occurred on or before July 1, 2023 as mandated in the legislation.

The information collected specific to Section 15 established all the Illinois public universities have some sort of childcare center or an otherwise affiliated childcare center except for EIU.

### **Compliance with Section 20**

IBHE considers this information as fully meeting the statutorily defined reporting requirements but also provided insight into the efficacy of using information partially sourced from the FAFSA to respond to the legislatively mandated reporting requirements. Over 75% of undergraduates at Illinois public universities had filed a FAFSA and responded to the student parent question.

All the Illinois public universities were in full compliance with Section 20 of the legislation by reporting the required information to IBHE on or before July 1, 2023.

### **Next Steps**

- IBHE is currently in the process of finalizing its student-level data collection processes to accommodate the collection of the student parent and marital status information in the coming academic years (e.g., information for fall of academic year 2023-24 will be collected starting in January of 2024).
- Next year, the outcomes information (retention, grade point average, credit accumulation, etc.) will be calculated for part-time students and perhaps other students who are not members of traditional first-time, full-time cohorts.