

# Exploring the Universe of Young Student Parents

For many young people, college can be a launchpad to higher earnings. For the roughly 1 in 5 undergraduates who are also parents, finishing college comes with additional challenges and motivators.

Starting in 2020, the Annie E. Casey Foundation partnered with James Bell Associates to evaluate Generation Hope, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting student parents in college through direct services, national advocacy, and research. Evaluators gained a better picture of the universe surrounding college students who became parents before age 21—specifically, participants in the Generation Hope Washington, DC, Scholar Program.

Children provide the main gravitational pull for young student parents to pursue their education. Among the participants (called Scholars) who provided information in 2025, 87% reported being motivated by their children to complete their degree.

**“My kiddos are my main motivation to go to college. They are my everything, and I want them to be proud of their mom and know that you can always achieve your goal.”**

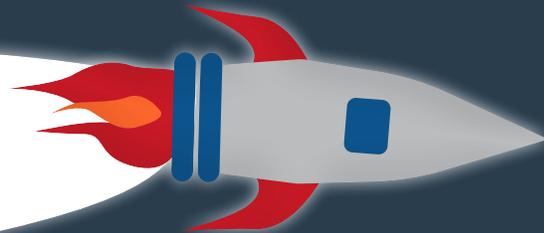


## Generation Hope

The Generation Hope Scholar Program operates sites in the Washington, DC, region, Greater New Orleans area, and the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The program provides mentoring, tuition assistance, peer support, and wraparound services to college students who became parents as teens to help them earn their degrees. Scholars are paired with a Hope Coach who provides holistic case management, helping them navigate school responsibilities while parenting. They are also matched with a volunteer Mentor with whom the Scholar can share concerns and celebrate successes.

*This publication reflects data and quotes collected from participants in the Washington, DC, Scholar Program. Data collection activities included Scholar surveys (87), individual interviews (35), and parent advisory submissions related to challenges (8) and motivation (6).*

Young student parents navigate a dynamic universe of shifting supports  and obstacles  that has been largely unexplored.



**KIDS**

**96%** had at least 1 child under age 6; Scholars had 2 kids, on average.

“What else has helped me stay on track? . . . My kids . . . Like, looking at their faces just makes me wanna do better.”

**CO-PARENT/RELATIONSHIPS**

**29%** were married/partnered.

**CHILDCARE**

**40%** used multiple forms of childcare.

**But** many were concerned with the high cost of childcare and lack of options during non-traditional hours.

**FRIENDS**

**47%** felt isolated, but after being enrolled in Generation Hope, they felt more connected to other student parents.

**COMPETING DEMANDS**

Young student parents reported that their school and family responsibilities compete, making it hard to keep up with both.

“Between attending classes, studying, and caring for my family, finding a balance can be incredibly difficult. There are only so many hours in a day, and it often feels like there’s never enough time to accomplish everything.”



## COMMUNITY

Most relied on churches, public programs, and community for support. Through Generation Hope, they gained individualized support from **2** more dedicated individuals—a Hope Coach and Mentor.

“I would say there’s a lot of support from my church as far as like just the different community that I get to experience with them. They’ve helped me with food several times, just like how Generation Hope has.”

## SCHOOL

**95%** planned to enroll the following semester or graduate.

## CHANGE OF COURSE

**43%** reported taking a semester off before returning to school.

## STIGMA

Young student parents reported facing barriers like stigma, which affected their mental health.

“I feel like it’s an ongoing battle because I guess when you’re a teen parent, everybody looks at you in a way where they kind of make you feel like less because you have children.”

## FAMILY

**89%** had at least 1 relative they could rely on for help.

“When I feel like I’m mentally overloaded, my mom . . . if I [have] homework to do, she’ll be like, ‘Hey, do you need help?’ or, ‘Let me take the girls.’ Those little things definitely help me.”

## LACK OF UNDERSTANDING

**24%** indicated they have someone who often or always understood them as a student parent.

## WORK

**31%** were employed full time; **30%** were employed part time.

## Supporting Young Student Parents

Even when Scholars experienced bumps in their orbit, they expressed pride for continuing to balance parenthood and school. Their journey can be made easier with targeted programs, services, and supports—such as those offered by Generation Hope.

Universities can also support young student parents by—

- Investing in on-campus childcare
- Developing and implementing family-friendly policies
- Gathering data on student parents to better understand their needs
- Incorporating family-friendly spaces into campus infrastructure

### Want to learn more?

[About the Evaluation](#)

[About Generation Hope](#)

“That’s one of the reasons I’m really happy that I have a Mentor. She kind of helps me prioritize things, which is really important, as in what deserves my full attention right now and what can be left for later.”



## Acknowledgment

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