



Building Pathways Initiative: State-Led Strategies for Student Success and Workforce Pathways

# Connecting the Dots: Today's Students

May 6, 2026

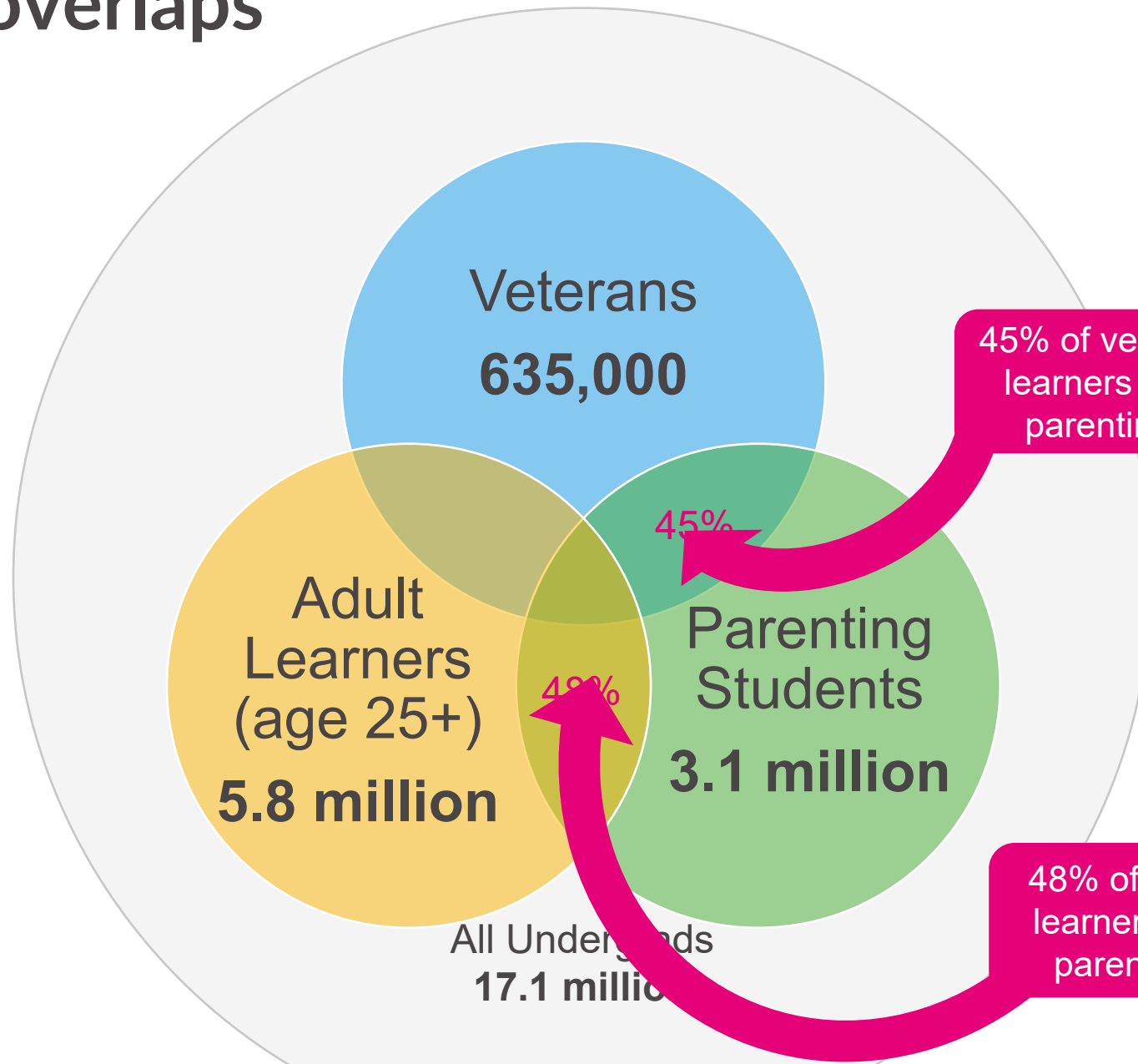


Theresa Anderson, Ph.D.



[www.urban.org](http://www.urban.org)

# Population overlaps



74% of parenting students **have a job**, working an average of 36 hours per week

51% of parenting students are at **community and technical colleges**

45% of veteran learners are parenting

48% of adult learners are parenting

Source: National Postsecondary Student Aid Study 2020

# Parenting Students Are an Excellent Design Population

Supporting student parents can be a win all around

Good for students

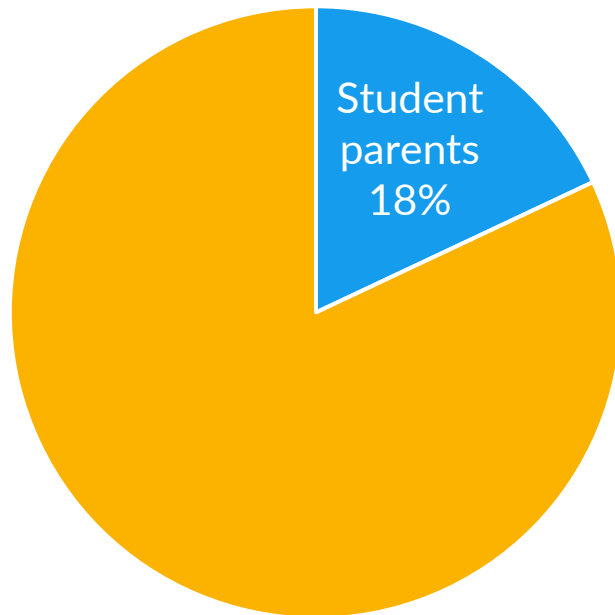
Good for children and families

Good for colleges

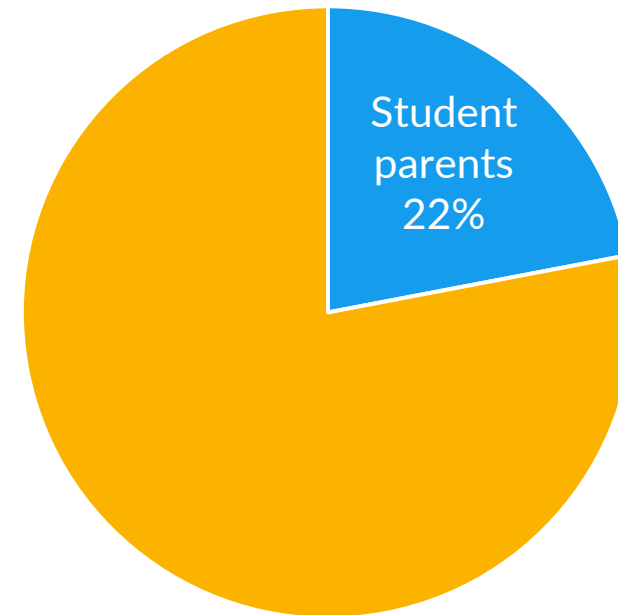
Good for taxpayers

# Who are parenting students?

Undergrads at all public colleges,  
2020



Undergrads at community  
colleges, 2020



**3.14 million undergrads**  
**+1 million graduate students**

# Parenting students are strong

Despite raising 2 children, working, and going to school, they have **similar or higher GPAs** than their nonparenting peers

# Supporting Student Parents Pays off



# Payoffs for mothers



*Mothers who reenroll in school*

+ \$2,900/year earnings gain



*Mothers who reenroll and complete a degree*

+ \$9,500/year earnings gain

# Payoffs for children



*Children of mothers who reenroll and complete a degree*

- + Gains in reading and verbal scores
- + 9% more likely to complete high school
- + 21% more likely to enroll in college
- + 38% more likely to get a college degree
- + \$5,700 average earnings gain per year in early adulthood

# Payoffs for colleges

Nationally, there are nearly **31 million** parents of minor children without a college degree who are not currently enrolled in school

- More than **1 in 3** have some college experience

**This is an important recruitment population!**

# Payoffs for the taxpayers



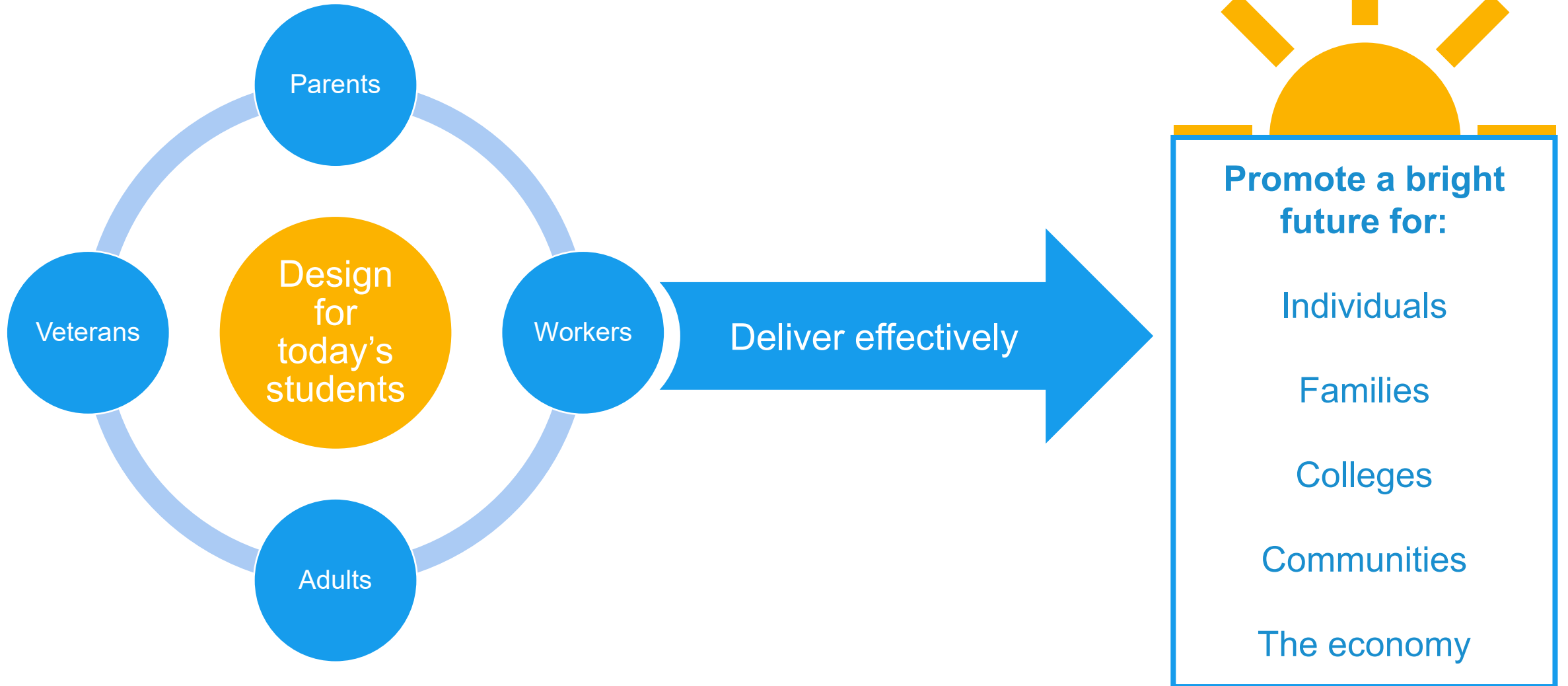
Investing in student parents pays off for taxpayers through higher taxes and lower benefit receipt

Specifically:

- **targeted supportive programming at public colleges** pays for itself **\$5.36 per \$1.00 spent**
- **a \$3000 annual scholarship for low-income parents** pays for itself **\$1.73 per \$1.00 spent**
- **affordable on-campus child care** pays for itself **\$1.24 per \$1.00 spent** (and yields the largest increase in graduates)

*That doesn't even count all the personal benefits to students and families – or broader benefits to communities!*

# Design for today's students to get tomorrow's best outcomes



# Thank you!

Theresa Anderson  
[tanderson@urban.org](mailto:tanderson@urban.org)