



# Building Pathways in Virginia: Bridging Education and Workforce for All Supporting Student Parents Benefits Virginia

August 25, 2025



Theresa Anderson, Ph.D.



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

## Show of hands

Who has been in school while parenting?

Who has known someone in school while parenting?

Supporting student parents can be a win all around

Good for students

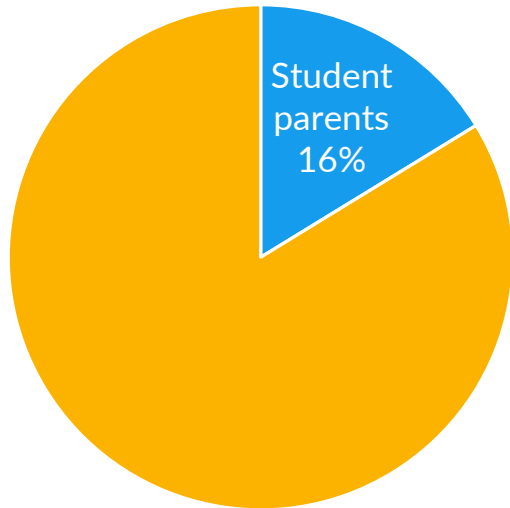
Good for children and families

Good for colleges

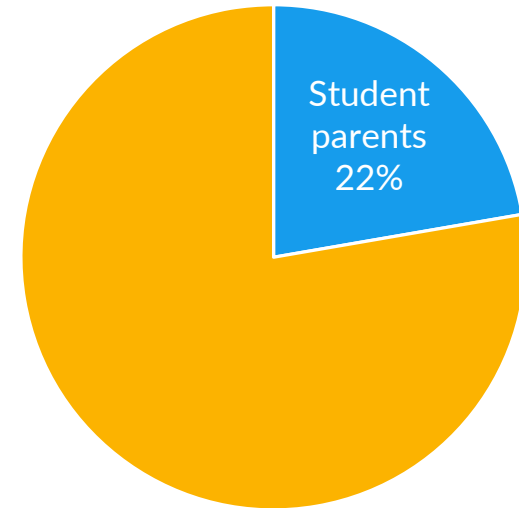
**Good for Virginia!**

# Who are student parents?

Undergrads at all public Virginia colleges, 2020



Undergrads at Virginia community colleges, 2020



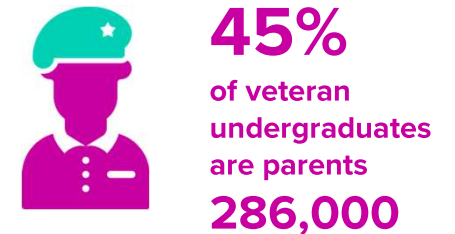
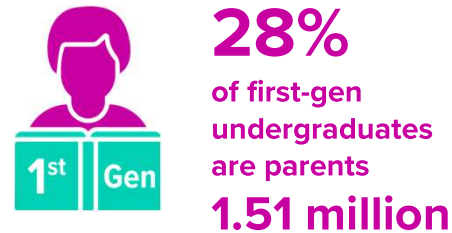
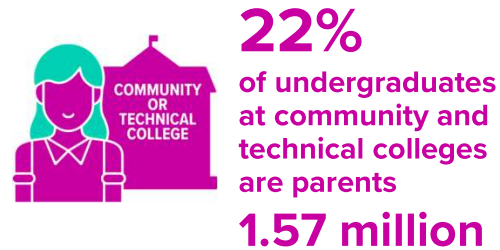
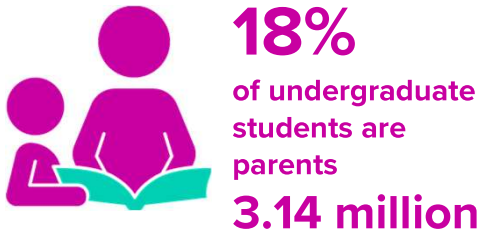
**55,000 undergrads**

## Virginia's parenting students are diligent – and busy

- 73% have a job, working an average of 36 hours per week
- Often enrolled part-time
- Have the same GPAs as nonparenting students
- Have 2 children on average, and half have a child under age 6

### Juggling three heavy balls!

# There is a large overlap with other priority groups



## Also more likely to be:

- First-generation college students
- Adult learners

# Veteran Undergraduate Student Parents

This summary profiles military veteran undergraduate college students with dependent children across the United States who were enrolled in the 2019–20 academic year.



**45%**  
of veteran undergraduates are parents  
**286,000**

## Dependent Children

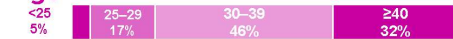
**44%** of veteran student parents have one child  
**56%** have two or more children  
**44%** have at least one child under age 6

## Gender



22% of nonparenting veteran students are female, 77% are male, and 1%\* have another gender identity

## Age



20% of nonparenting veteran students are under age 25, 29% are 25–29, 29% are 30–39, and 21% are 40 or older

## Race and Ethnicity



53% of nonparenting veteran students are white, 15% are Black, 15% are Latine, 2%\* are American Indian or Alaska Native (AIAN) or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (NHPI), 4% are Asian, and 11% are multiple races or ethnicities

## Enrollment



72% of nonparenting veteran students are enrolled full time and 28% are enrolled part time

## Institutions



49% of nonparenting veteran students are enrolled in a community or technical college, 26% in a public baccalaureate institution, 14% in a private nonprofit, and 11% in a private for-profit institution

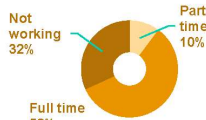
## Social

**Married: 65%**  
27% of nonparenting veteran students are married

**First-gen: 48%**  
36% of nonparenting veteran students are first-generation college students

**Veteran: 100%**  
100% of nonparenting veteran students are veterans

## Employment and Economic Well-Being While Enrolled



31% of nonparenting veteran students are not working, 22% are working part time, and 47% are working full time



**20%**  
could not come up with \$500 in the next month

15% of nonparenting veteran students could not come up with \$500



**6%**  
were recently homeless

9% of nonparenting veteran students were recently homeless



**24%**  
are food insecure

21% of nonparenting veteran students are food insecure



**17%**  
participate in SNAP

5% of nonparenting veteran students participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

For more information and to pull similar statistics, explore the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study: 2020 Undergraduate Students in the National Center for Education Statistics' DataLab tool at <https://nces.ed.gov/datalab>.

Note: Data collection was interrupted by COVID-19 shutdowns, so parenting students might be underrepresented in this data source. Dependent children may be up to age 25. Enrollment intensity represents fall enrollment among those enrolled in the fall term. College types are recategorized using a detailed sector variable. Values may not sum to 100 because of rounding. An asterisk (\*) indicates that an estimate is imprecise because of large standard errors.

Theresa Anderson (Urban Institute), Sheron Gittens (STAR Fellow), and Kate Westaby (Urban Institute) Student-Parent Action Through Research Knowledge (SPARK) Collaborative | [studentparentaction.org](http://studentparentaction.org)  
September 2024



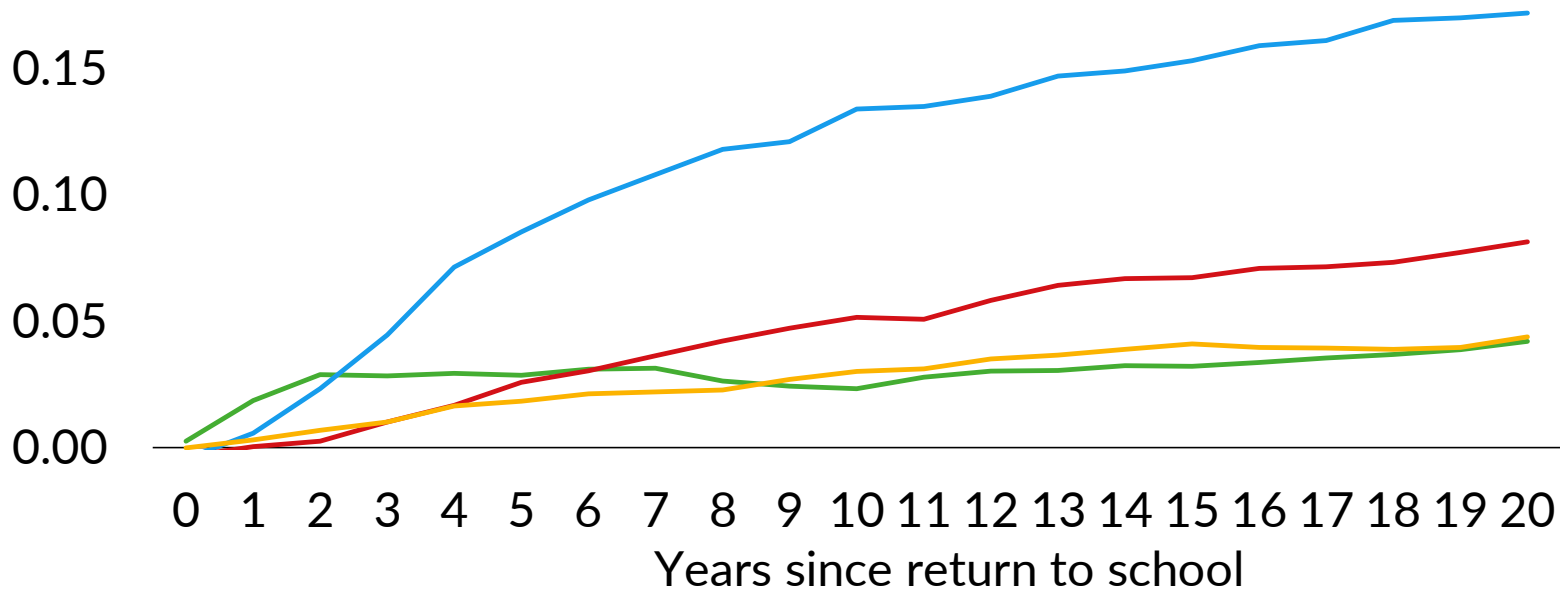
[studentparentaction.org/  
resources/data-insights](http://studentparentaction.org/resources/data-insights)



# Student parents (mothers in this chart) can take many years to complete a degree

- HS Diploma
- 4-Year College Degree
- College Degree
- Graduate Degree

Impact on probability of having an academic credential



**1/3 of student mothers complete a higher credential eventually**

**Less than 1/4 of mothers who did not have a college degree completed one**

**Student parents are 55% less likely to complete a degree or credential in 6 years, even after controlling for demographics**

# Supporting Student Parents Pays off

## Payoffs for mothers



*Mothers  
who  
reenroll  
in school*

**+** \$2,800/year earnings gain



*Mothers  
who  
reenroll  
and complete  
a degree*

**+** \$9,200/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
- +** \$5,600 average earnings gain per year in early adulthood

## Payoffs for colleges

In Virginia, there are over **700,000** 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 Virginia



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!*

## Option 1: Establish a comprehensive student-parent support program on public college campuses

- An on-campus office for student parents with child-friendly study spaces
- An average of 4 benefits navigators focused on student parents in each office (office size could be adjusted proportionally to the size of the college's student parent population)
- Early registration and flexible scheduling options, tuition waivers covering the financial aid gap for parents
- Student-parent resource groups

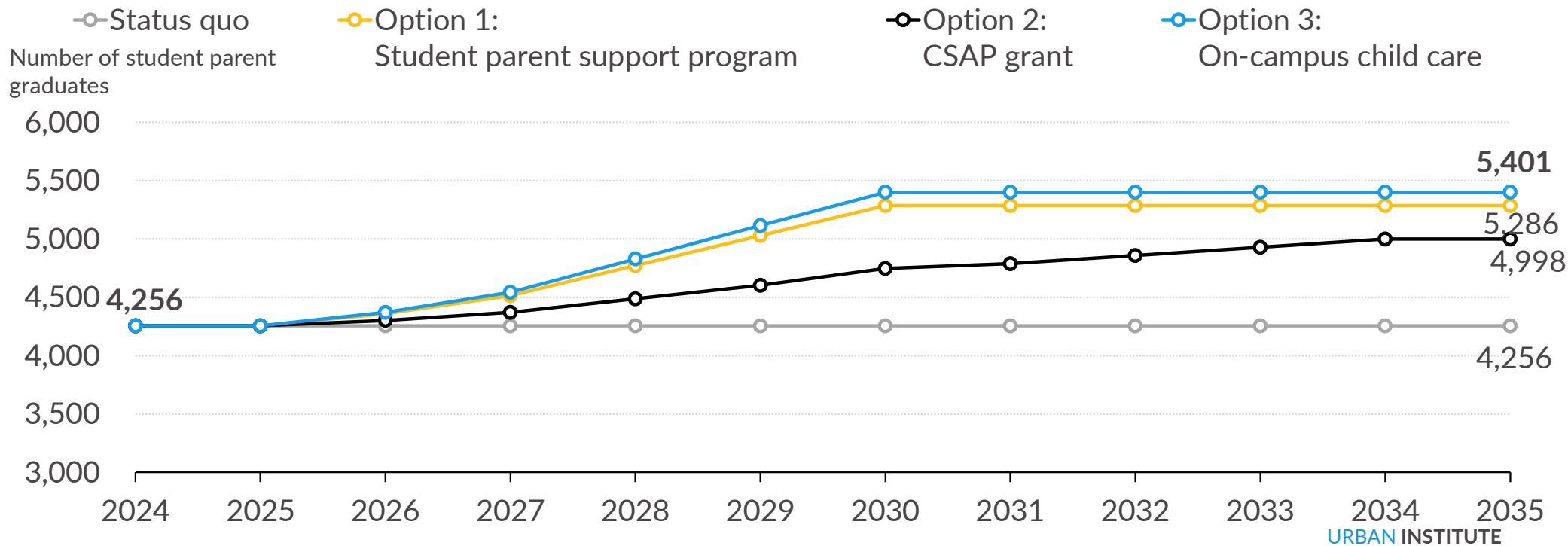
## Option 2: Give parents college scholarships

- Parents under the federal poverty level would receive an average of \$3,000 annually through the existing CSAP grant structure
- Benefits would slowly decline until income rises above 150% of the federal poverty level
- Funding would flow through financial aid with colleges first applying the money toward tuition balances
- Remaining balances would be refunded to student parents

## Option 3: Provide on-campus child care

- Licensed on-campus child care at all Virginia public colleges (funding shared between the state government, VCCS, and public universities)
- Each family would contribute \$2,000 annually per child (\$200 per month for 10 months of care)
- Providers would accept state subsidies for students who qualify
- Each program would enroll an average of 550 children—some would be enrolled part time, which would help maintain a feasible physical center size
- All student parents with low income (below 150 percent of the federal poverty level) would be eligible, though there might still be capacity constraints based on center size

# Projected student-parent graduates under each option



Source: Authors' projections based on previous empirical research.

Notes: CSAP = College Scholarship Assistance Program. For a more detailed explanation of the methodology, see the Findings section.

# Details on Payoffs

	Number of Additional Graduates	Public Benefit per Graduate	Total Program Cost	Total Public Benefit	Benefits Minus Costs (Net Benefits)	Public Benefit per \$1
Student Parent Support Program	<b>7,830</b>	\$292,419	\$427,055,918	\$2,289,520,115	\$1,862,464,197	<b>\$5.36</b>
CSAP Grant Program	<b>4,522</b>	\$292,419	\$763,041,440	\$1,322,406,751	\$559,365,311	<b>\$1.73</b>
On-Campus Child Care	<b>8,700</b>	\$292,419	\$2,043,886,099	\$2,544,170,821	\$500,284,722	<b>\$1.24</b>

*Values are in 2024 dollars*

What else can we do?

## Collect data!

*“When you are invisible, so are your problems.”*

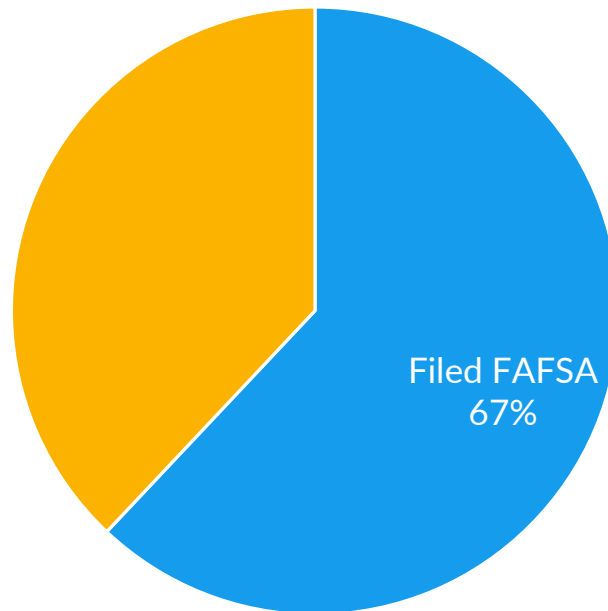
Knowing averages on the national, regional, or even state level is not enough.

- Colleges and college systems needs to be able to identify:
  - How many parenting students they are serving, and how many could they be serving
  - What their parenting students look like
  - What the trajectories are for their students

# Okay, so how?

## FAFSA is not enough

Undergrads at Virginia public colleges, 2020



# Colleges Will Need New Data Collection Efforts to Identify Parenting Students after Changes to Financial Aid Forms

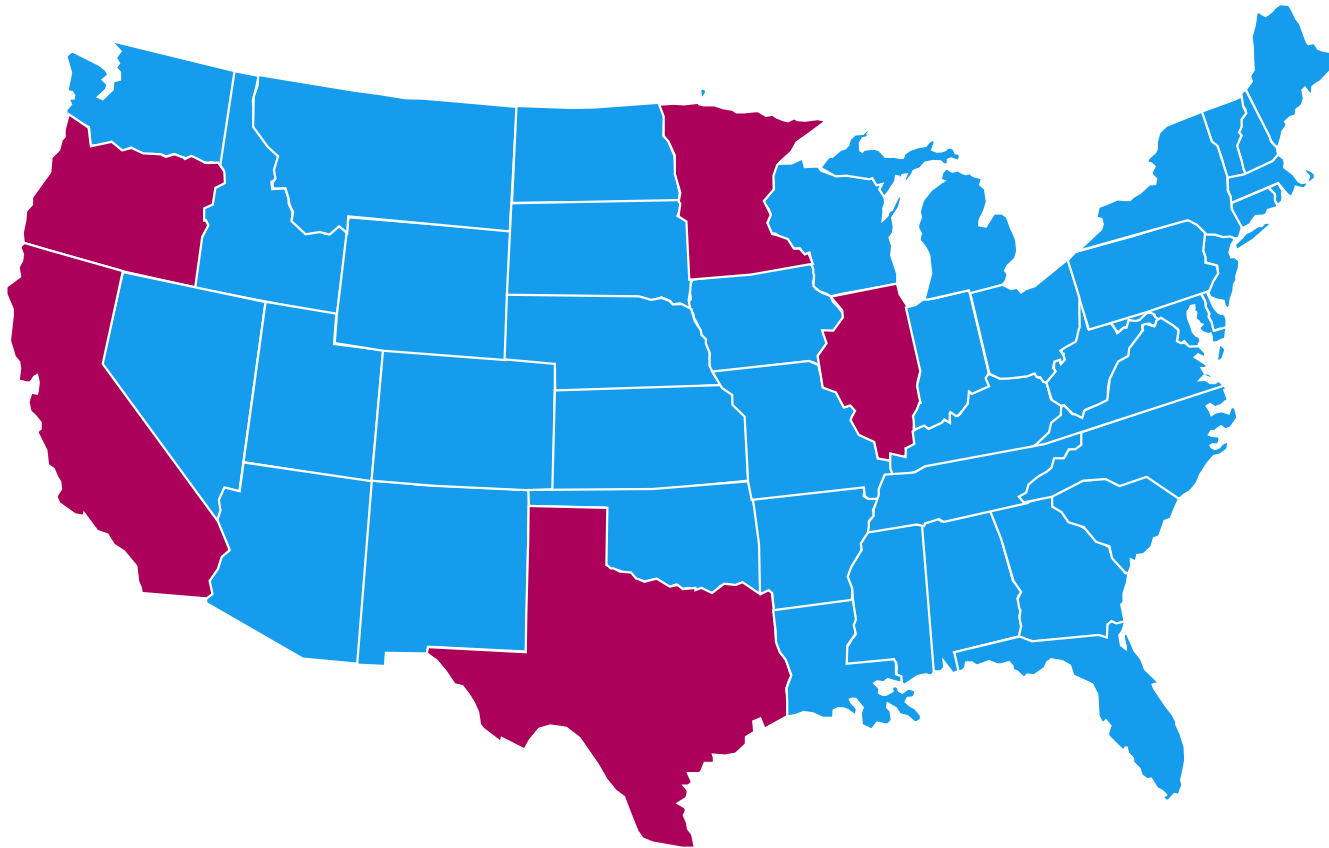
Theresa Anderson

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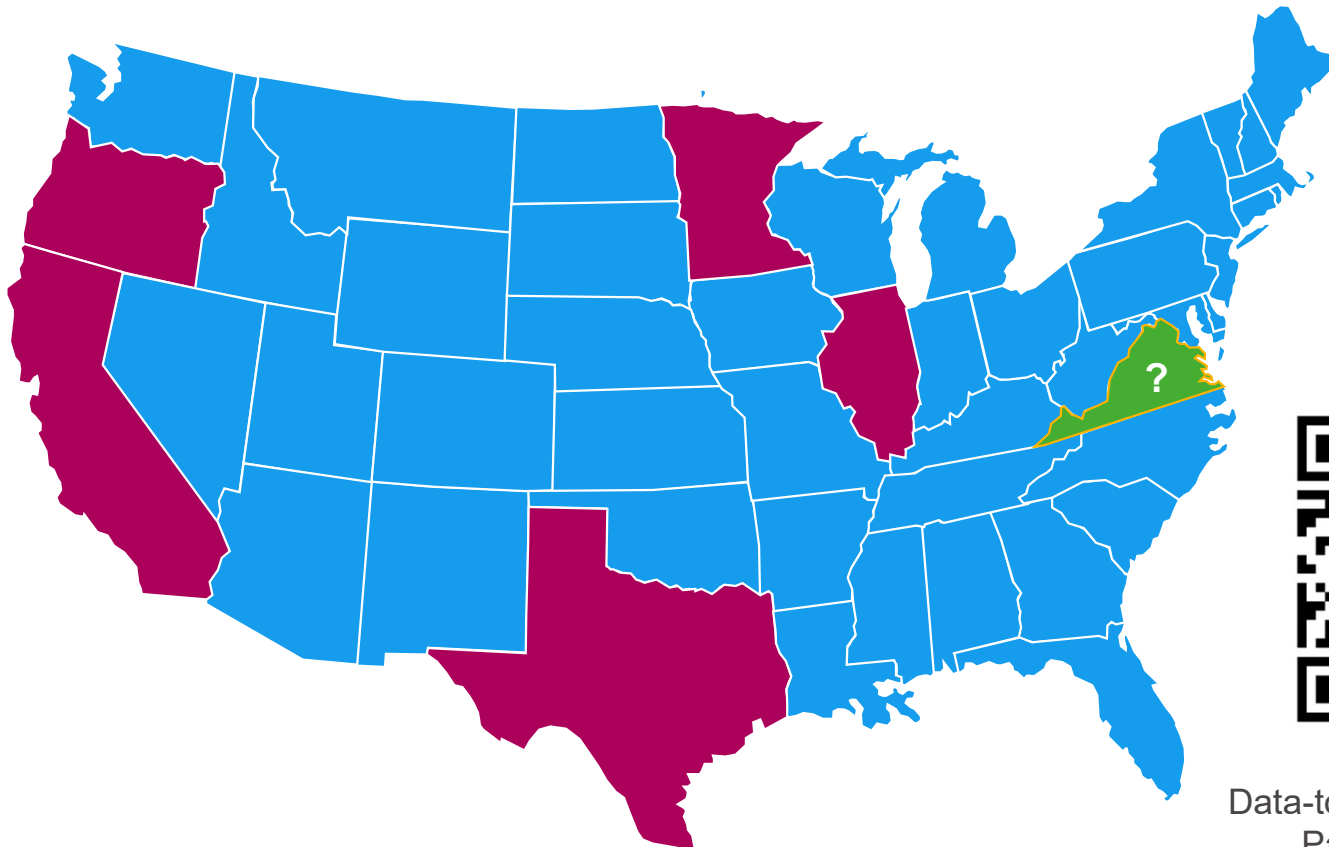


DATA

# A growing number of states have student-parent data collection



# A growing number of states have student-parent data collection



Learn more:  
Data-to-Action Campaign for  
Parenting Students

*Thank you!*

Questions?

*Stay in touch!*  
Theresa Anderson  
[tanderson@urban.org](mailto:tanderson@urban.org)