

“Family strengthening means that children do better when their families are strong, and families do better when they live in communities that help them succeed.” - Annie E. Casey Foundation

Though it is crucial to understand that all student-parents and their families are unique individuals with unique needs, there are many common areas where most of our student-parents could use extra support.

One of the most common issues that we hear from student-parents is that they are not even aware of what college academic support services exist. Furthermore, being able to utilize them is another challenge. Student-parents tend to come and go off campus quickly; they are running to class in between dropping kids at childcare or school and tending to other family obligations. Many student-parents have jobs in addition to their academic and family responsibilities.

While the FRC focuses on 2-Gen approaches, we also offer programs that directly address parental needs because we know that when parents do well, family units are strong and children are successful.

What are some typical challenges that student parents face?

Student-parents face all of the same challenges that any community college student faces with the added stress of balancing family needs. It's harder for them to commit to classes, homework and study time. They're less likely to stay in school and often start and stop their studies. Student-parents are also less likely to spend time outside of classes on campus as the demands of family, work and academic life leave little time for extracurricular activities. Because of this, they are less likely to have a supportive social network and knowledge or access to available campus resources.

It was obvious to us that in order for the programs and services we offer to succeed, they would need to provide a clear benefit to student-parents and offer some sort of essential skill or service.

What is social capital and how do your programs support this?

Social capital is the idea that social networks have value. Think of how many times you've benefited from a social connection either directly or via a referral; maybe a lead on a job or apartment? When people have social capital they have more access to peer support, to information and even to economic opportunity.

Our programs help our student-parents build social capital by connecting them to other student-parents and by introducing them to relevant campus and community resources. By helping them to build their social capital, we are giving them the tools that they can then use to advance themselves and their children both socially and economically.

What Targeted-Services Do You Offer?

- Parenting classes and Workshops: We offer workshops and classes on a variety of subject matters all led by trained staff. Subjects have included: language development, discipline, sleep, feeding routines, finding quality childcare, reconnecting with your child after being away, etc. Group leaders are asked to make sure this is interactive and that parents have a chance to ask questions, interact, take the lead.

- Registration Assistance: We work with staff members each semester to identify registration appointments then use education plans from campus advisors and help student-parents learn to navigate the online portal to register. We help the students to strategize when needed classes are full or not available at times that work for their family schedule. We also encourage faculty to schedule sections of courses at times that meet the needs of students-parents (i.e. around preschool schedules, babysitters, etc.).

- CPR & First Aid: We offer infant through adult classes. This is another opportunity to bring parents together and students are available to play with children during training.

- Group Advisement: General Advising appointments can fill fast and are often available at times that are inconvenient for student-parents. We work with an advisor to offer group academic advisement sessions to help student-parents plan classes, discuss transfer requirements and to address financial aid concerns.

- Support Groups with other Student-Parents: These groups are student-led and initiated and driven by their interests and needs. We have staff available for facilitation and support as needed. This is a great method for building social networks for support. Informal ties like babysitting exchanges often come from these groups.

- Special Needs Referrals: A Child Development Specialist is available to make referrals to regional centers and also advocates for student-parents as they begin the process of assessing and securing appropriate intervention services for their child..

Can you give an example of how a student-parent has utilized and benefited from these services?

Alicia was a first-generation college student and nursing mom with a week-old newborn when she returned to school full-time. She was lucky to have a math professor who allowed her to use his office for pumping but she then had to carry her pump and cooler with her for the remainder of the day. Thankfully, she was

referred to the FRC by another professor where she was able to use our private lactation room and store her milk in the fridge. Alicia began bringing her daughter to our Infant and Toddler playgroups when she was four months old. Later, she took advantage of our mentoring programs and was encouraged to apply to a University. Alicia is currently a Senior and will graduate with a BA in the Fall. She plans to apply to graduate school and continues to use our computer lab services, the baby clothes exchange and the lending library on a regular basis.

Alicia's story is an excellent example of how many of our students first come to the FRC and then use our resources to fit their individual needs. We are thrilled when students like Alicia put our programs to good work and then move on to their next big adventure.

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