

Kent State University Develops a Five Year Strategic Plan for Parenting Students Utilizing the **Family Friendly Campus Toolkit**

Kent State University is a large public institution with 40,000 students on eight campuses in northeastern Ohio. Since 2006, the university has sponsored a small support program for single parent students. In 2018, motivated in part by concerns about retention and graduation rates, the dean of students decided to initiate a focus on all students with dependent children. The university found just what it was looking for at a NASPA conference presentation on the *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes*. Kent State staff and faculty spent the next year following the process laid out in the Toolkit, resulting in a Five Year Strategic Plan for Parenting Students, as requested by the dean.

MEET KENISHA CHISHOLM

Kenisha Chisholm is a 27-year-old single mom of a seven-year-old daughter from Cleveland, Ohio. She originally began college at University of Akron in 2010 as a first-generation college student, but had to drop out during her sophomore year when she became pregnant. Being a new, young mom while working full-time, Kenisha lacked support to continue her education. She made a promise to herself and her daughter that no matter how hard or how long it took, she would obtain her college degree. Kenisha eventually began to take courses part time, on and off, at Cuyahoga Community College while continuing full-time work. She relocated to pursue a bachelor's degree at Kent State University, where the Literacy and Independence for Family Education (LIFE) program provides support for single parent students.

With her grade point average (GPA) of 3.11, she expects to graduate in May 2020 and continue her studies to pursue a master's degree.

“I give a tremendous amount of thanks to the faculty and staff of Kent State’s LIFE program. I know that their continuous support has been a catalyst for my success thus far, and I’m very grateful to have been given the opportunity to be a part of such a supportive program.”

— Kenisha Chisholm,
Class of 2020



Kenisha and her daughter Kamari

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit is a no-cost, award-winning self-assessment system and guide for improving supports and outcomes for students who are raising children. Two- and four-year colleges and universities have used the Toolkit’s resources to:

- **raise awareness about the strengths, needs, and challenges of student parents;**
- **increase visibility of existing supports and improve services;**
- **learn about recommended practices;**
- **develop new resources devoted to student parent success.**

The Toolkit includes:

- a student parent survey;
- a list of recommended practices;
- a profile of existing services;
- guidance for setting up a Task Force, collecting institutional data, and conducting focus groups;
- action and dissemination plan templates and other resources.

To download the Toolkit, please visit:
familyfriendlycampustoolkit.endicott.edu

PROCESS AND PLANS

To start the process of implementing the Toolkit, **Kent State's dean of students (now vice president for student affairs) set up a broadly representative Parenting Students Task Force**, to be led by the director of the Center for Adult and Veteran Services. The dean charged it with leading "our institutional review of the student-parent experience" and creating a Five Year Strategic Plan for Parenting Students by the end of the year. The task force proceeded to collect data using the guidance and tools in the Toolkit, which informed the recommendations and other features of the strategic plan.

In addition to new programming, this effort has led to important new

information about the student parent population on campus. While the financial aid office was not able to share specific student IDs or emails, it did provide detailed demographic data, including age, major, Federal Pell Grant eligibility, and GPA ranges. The parenting student survey provided direct information about personal and academic experiences on campus, challenges related to parenting status, and needs for specific supports and services.

Goals of the Kent State plan cover retention, engagement, and community cohesion objectives; new infrastructure to identify, track, assess, and support this population; raising awareness about this group; and cultivating a

culture of care throughout the campuses.

While the school does not anticipate creating a new office or position, it does plan to create centralized access to information about resources specifically helpful for student parents. Among its many recommendations, the strategic plan also calls for multi-year discussions to create family-friendly campus policies and to consider providing family housing and drop-in childcare. At the end of five years, the Center for Adult and Veteran Services and others involved in this process expect to see changes in the culture, services, supports, and policies concerning parents of dependent children throughout the Kent State University campuses.

"The work of engaging students who are parenting is critical to the success of any institution. Kent State University is proud to continue deepening its work on becoming a student-ready university by focusing on ensuring the success of our parenting students."

— Lamar R. Hylton, Ph.D.
Interim Vice President
Division of Student Affairs
Kent State University

Josh Rider, Campus Advocate

Josh Rider has been the director of the Center for Adult and Veteran Services for the past six years and is currently also serving as interim assistant dean of students. In addition to other services it provides, the Center administers the LIFE program for single parents and provides services to students with dependents. Rider has led the strategic planning and Toolkit implementation processes and continues to lead the implementation of the Five Year Strategic Plan for Parenting Students. "It's especially important to gather lots of folks to the table," says Rider. "This isn't just my work, this is the work of the whole university." The biggest challenges have been limited resources and navigating the bureaucracy of a higher education institution. What he likes best? Helping student parents, a very high-risk population, graduate and move on to successful careers.

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The *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes* was developed by the Program Evaluation and Research Group (PERG) at Endicott College, with support from the U.S. Department of Education and Lumina Foundation. For more information, contact Joan Karp at jkarp@endicott.edu or Elizabeth Osche at eosche@endicott.edu.

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