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Challenges Facing Student Parents

One in four postsecondary students in the U.S. are also parents.\(^1\) Student parents work hard to balance school, work, and child care responsibilities. Unfortunately, today’s student parents face additional challenges, including above average unemployment rates, stagnant wages, and rising tuition and child care costs. For example, the cost of child care and education has grown from two percent of the total cost of raising a child in 1960 to 18 percent of the cost in 2013. For the 25 percent of student-parents that live below the poverty line, these increasing costs make it hard to pursue and complete a postsecondary degree.

Given high tuition and child care costs, it is perhaps no surprise that about 40 percent of student parents also work full-time jobs, and are more likely to take evening classes than their childless peers. Student parents with more than one child face additional challenges – an additional infant or toddler reduces the probability of degree completion by close to 50 percent, compared to one’s childless peers. And student parents who do manage to complete their Bachelor’s degree end up with 25 percent more student debt than non-parents.

Nonetheless, parents who complete a postsecondary degree are likely to gain employment options and see increased wages over their lifetimes. Increasingly, having a postsecondary degree is becoming a necessity for economic security; by 2020, 65 percent of jobs will require postsecondary education. Investing in the child care needs of young parents is a smart move to support the economies of young families and the nation’s economy as a whole.

The Need for Affordable Campus-Based Child Care

- **The cost of infant care is higher than tuition at most public colleges,**\(^2\) ranging from $4,515 per year in Tennessee to $12,320 per year in Massachusetts. Without support, the combined costs of child care and tuition meant that a postsecondary degree may be out of reach for low-income parents.
- **A recent survey found that the average child care center at universities across the country has a waiting list 85 percent as large as its total capacity.** Campus-based child care programs need to be expanded to meet current demand.
- **Student parents spend one third less time on their studies than their peers.** Access to affordable campus-based child care can help parents spend more time on their education.
- **Many student parents work in low-wage jobs where they struggle with unpredictable and unstable work schedules.** Having access to reliable and affordable child care on campus can go a long way toward helping these students balance their education and work commitments.

The CCAMPIS Program: Opportunities and Shortfalls

The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program provides funding for campus-based programs that provide subsidized child care to low-income students (determined by Pell Grant...
eligibility). Students may also be required to maintain a minimum course load and/or good academic standing to receive child care subsidies. The CCAMPIS program has proven positive results. In 2002-2004, recipients of CCAMPIS funds had an average 65 percent retention rate, compared to an average overall retention rate of approximately 50 percent for student parents during a similar time period.

However, funding for the CCAMPIS program has been cut in recent years – from $25 million in 2001 down to $15 million in 2014, reducing the number of schools served and the average grant size. And the current program does not come close to meeting existing need. Only 86 schools received CCAMPIS funding last year, leaving American schools are short almost 1 million child care spaces.

**Recommendations to Bolster CCAMPIS**

**Restore and Expand Funding for CCAMPIS**

- At a minimum, Congress should restore CCAMPIS to its pre-recession funding of $25 million. This would help nearly 5,000 more student parents.
- However, to fully meet demand for the program, Congress should increase funding for CCAMPIS to $500 million. Doing so would provide child care to all of the roughly 250,000 student parents living below the poverty line. Congress could do this by making CCAMPIS a matching grant program, with $250 million in funding from the federal government and $250 million from states and institutions.
- In short, for the cost of less than four next-gen fighter jets (the F-35 is projected at $136 million each – we will build nearly 2,500 of them), we could pay for every low-income student parent to have campus-based child care.

**Make CCAMPIS a Matching Grant Program**

- One way to meet funding needs for the program is to make CCAMPIS a matching grant program, with investments from the federal government, state governments, and institutions. By making states and institutions match the funding they get from the federal government, everyone has a greater stake in the outcomes of this program.

**Establish Institutional Accountability Measures**

- To further incentivize schools to invest in student parent outcomes, Congress should require schools receiving CCAMPIS funding to attain at least a 50 percent retention rate among their CCAMPIS recipients.
- Requiring a 50 percent retention rate would remove the bottom 20 percent of institutions, raising the average retention rate to over 80 percent and completion rate to over 35 percent.
- Without requiring a 50 percent retention rate, institutions that fail to invest in students would unfairly receive funding. The bottom 20 percent of CCAMPIS recipients only had a 19 percent graduation rate for student parents.

Mom and Dad Go to Class: Proposals for Expanding Campus-Based Child Care


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