

Head Start-College partnerships as a strategy for promoting family economic success: A study of benefits, challenges, and promising programs ^[1]

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Excerpted from introduction

Improving family economic security in the United States requires new strategies to support parents while they develop skills and attain education to prepare them for well-paid jobs. Postsecondary education brings a range of benefits to graduates and their families, including enhanced economic stability and mobility, improved health and wellbeing, and better educational outcomes among their children (Attewell and Lavin 2007; Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2011; Gault, Milli, and Reichlin Cruse 2018; Hout 2012; Magnuson 2007; Sabol et al. 2019; Sommer et al. 2019; Zhan and Pandey 2004). Connecting parents living in poverty with the opportunity to earn higher credentials can help them achieve economic security, and their chances of success substantially improve when they have access to services that help them balance caregiving, financial, and work responsibilities while in school.

The federal Head Start program pairs high-quality early childhood education for children with support for parents. The Head Start Program Performance Standards include a directive for programs to help parents set and make progress toward self-sufficiency goals, including goals related to education and career pathways, in an effort to improve families' economic security (45 CFR § 1302.50). The directive includes guidance on the use of partnerships with community-based organizations, which can include postsecondary institutions, to support families and parents' goal achievement (45 CFR § 1302.53).

Research suggests that access to affordable, high-quality child care can increase parents' ability to complete educational programs, and that without it, their chances of persistence and completion are much lower (Hess et al. 2014; Johnson and Rochkind 2009; Reichlin Cruse et al. 2018). Additional evidence demonstrates how supports like coaching and referrals to services—integral components of the Head Start program—can promote college persistence among students with low incomes (Evans et al. 2017; Scrivener et al. 2015). Greater collaboration between Head Start and college campuses stands out as a potential strategy to increase the postsecondary success of parents who need enhanced support. 1 A substantial share of parents and their children could benefit from more partnerships between Head Start and colleges: nearly half (46 percent) of college students who are parents of children under 6 meet the income-eligibility requirements for Head Start, as do more than half of single student parents with children under 6 (65 percent; IWPR 2019a).

Region: United States ^[3]

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