

Child care for parents in college: A state-by-state assessment ^[1]

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Source: Institute for Women's Policy Research

Format: Report

Publication Date: 1 Sep 2016

AVAILABILITY

Full briefing paper PDF ^[2]

Introduction

Child care is a crucial support for the 4.8 million parents in college, but it is difficult for students to find and afford. Balancing the responsibilities of school, family, and work, student parents with young children rely on affordable, reliable child care arrangements to manage the many demands on their time while pursuing a postsecondary credential (Gault et al. 2014). Much of student parents' need for care goes unmet, however, contributing to their low rates of degree attainment: only one-third attain a degree or certificate within six years of enrollment (Gault et al. 2014; Miller, Gault, and Thorman 2011). For many of the parents who leave school without earning a credential, better access to child care could have helped them avoid taking a break or dropping out completely (Hess et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2009).

Student parents' ability to find and pay for child care varies by state. Differences in the availability of child care on college campuses and in the restrictiveness of state eligibility rules for child care assistance means that many student parents have limited access to the services they need to complete school. This briefing paper analyzes data from the U.S. Department of Education on the share of public institutions that provide campus child care, and reviews current state child care subsidy rules, to assess state variation in the challenges facing student parents' access to affordable, quality child care.

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