

INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH
1200 18TH STREET NW, SUITE 301 ♦ WASHINGTON, DC 20036

#C375

Child Care at College Campuses: a Critical Resource for Student Parents

**Testimony of Kevin Miller, Ph.D.,
Institute for Women's Policy Research**

**Before the Committee on Higher Education
of the New York City Council**

October 21, 2010

Chairman Rodriguez and members of the committee,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the issue of child care and the needs of student parents pursuing postsecondary education both nationally and at the City University of New York.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research, or IWPR, conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. IWPR has conducted research on issues connected to education, workforce development and training, and child care and early education for the last two decades. IWPR has previously produced several reports on child care and early education and has worked with state governments in producing estimates of the cost of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Since 2008, IWPR has been funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to conduct research on the issue of supports for students pursuing postsecondary education while raising children. Student parents face many challenges to successful accessing and completing postsecondary education programs. Although not the only obstacle to the ability of student parents to successfully pursue higher education, child care is perhaps the largest.

A Picture of Student Parents in Higher Education

Parents of dependent children now make up nearly a quarter (3.7 million) of the undergraduate students in the United States, and half of those parents are single parents (1.9 million). Student parents are more likely than non-parent students to attend community colleges and non-degree institutions—13.1 percent of students at four-year institutions are parents, compared to 29.2 percent of students at community colleges.

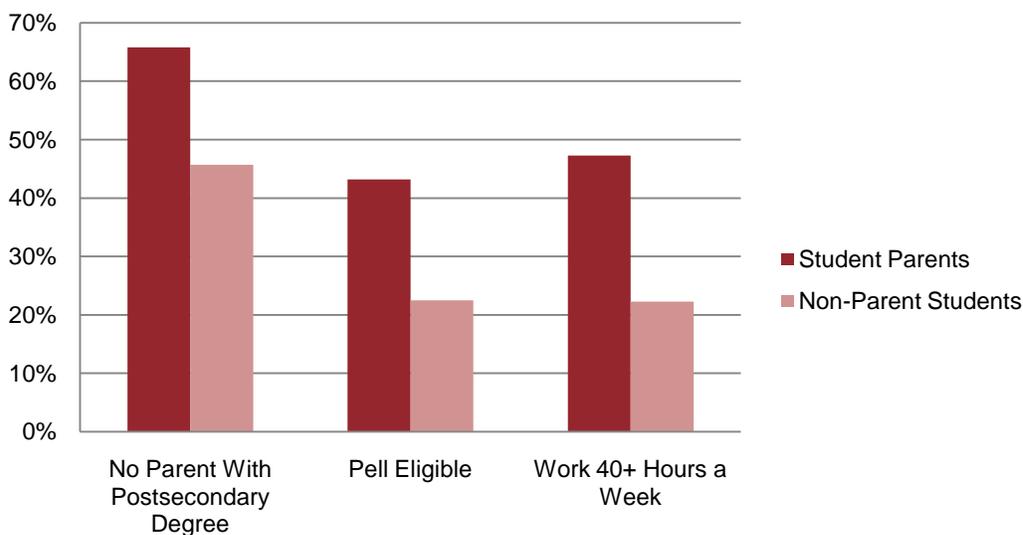
Table 1. Undergraduate Student Parents Attending Postsecondary Institutions Nationally, by Gender and Institution Type

	Community Colleges	Four Year Institutions	All Postsecondary Institutions
All Student Mothers	1,330,000	791,000	2,640,000
Percent	20.1%	8.8%	16.5%
All Student Fathers	603,000	386,000	1,094,000
Percent	9.1%	4.3%	6.8%
All Student Parents	1,932,000	1,177,000	3,735,000
Percent	29.2%	13.1%	23.3%
All Students	6,618,000	8,986,000	16,028,000
Percent	100%	100%	100%

It is possible to generalize from national numbers to the CUNY student body, utilizing enrollment figures available from the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment. If we assume that the CUNY system’s student body is similar to that of the nation as a whole on several demographic variables (notably, the proportion who are parents at the community college and senior college levels) then of the 226,000 undergraduates enrolled in the CUNY system in Fall 2009, 19.4 percent—or about 44,000—are student parents. Of these, 26,000 are enrolled at the community colleges and 18,000 at the senior colleges. It is important to emphasize that these numbers are based on national data not specific to the CUNY system and are rough estimates.

Student parents face a number of challenges to succeeding in postsecondary settings. They are 45 percent less likely to come from a family with a parent that holds a postsecondary degree, almost twice as likely to be low-income (as indicated by eligibility for Pell grants), and more than twice as likely to work full time as students who are not parents of dependent children (IWPR 2010).

Figure 1. Challenges Faced by Student Parents



Student Parents and Postsecondary Completion

U.S. Department of Education (2003) data show that student parents—across institution types—are more likely to have left postsecondary education (49.7 percent without degree and no longer attending) after six years than are non-parents (31.1 percent without degree and no longer attending). Overall completion rates among those receiving bachelor’s degrees, associate’s degrees, and certificates show a similar pattern, with 54 percent of non-parents completing a degree or certificate within six years (34.2 percent with a bachelor’s degree) compared to 40 percent of parents (3.8 percent with a bachelor’s degree).

Interestingly, single parents are somewhat more likely to complete a degree or certificate within six years (46 percent completion rate) than are other student parents. Among students beginning their postsecondary education at a community college, single parents are also more likely than both other parents and non-parents to complete a certificate or associate’s degree within six years (40 percent compared to 22 percent and 24 percent respectively), but are less likely than others to have transferred to another institution (e.g. to pursue a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution). This remains true even when comparing only among students who began their postsecondary education with a goal of pursuing an associate’s degree or certificate. A picture emerges of student parents—especially single parents—that are more likely to quit postsecondary education, less likely to obtain a bachelor’s degree, but also likely to work successfully to complete shorter programs, earning associate’s degrees or certificates.

In *Passing the Torch* (2007), Attewell and Levin studied a year 2000 sample of 2,000 women who pursued education at the City University of New York after that institution began offering open admission to all graduates of New York City high schools in 1970, while also examining national longitudinal datasets. They found that many women who initially attended CUNY but stopped out did eventually reenroll and complete degrees. They also found that attending and graduating from college made it much more likely that the children of the women in the 1970-2000 sample from CUNY would themselves seek out postsecondary education. This relationship remains statistically significant across racial groups, economic factors, IQ, and other variables.

Child Care and Student Parent Success

Student parents must balance many priorities – their finances, their children’s health and education, their relationships and friendships, their performance in their job or jobs, and their schooling. And at every point in the day during which their children are not with them, someone must watch over their children. For the large portion of student parents who also work, this means care during their work hours, during their class hours, and if they are lucky, during time to study, complete assignments, and take care of other daily necessities.

Research has found that child care is a crucial factor in determining whether or not parents choose to pursue postsecondary education. A study of student parents attending community college found that over 80 percent of respondents reported that the availability of child care was very important in the decision to attend college and 46 percent reported that campus child care was the first priority factor when enrolling in college. Nearly 60 percent of respondents reported they could not have continued college without child care services and 95 percent reported that child care was crucial in making their decision to increase their college class load (Keyes and Boulten 1995). In another study, focus group participants at community colleges identified stable child care, personal support from family members, peers, and college faculty and staff, and

accommodating employers as leading factors influencing their ability to enroll in college (Matus-Grossman et al. 2002).

Once in college, student parents make up a diverse group with a wide array of child care needs. A 2002 study of 479 student parents at Eastern Michigan University—which has a diverse population that includes a significant proportion of female single heads of households living at or below the poverty line—showed that child care problems had a significant negative impact on student success. Among the respondents 45 percent were single parents, 48 percent had two or more children, 85 percent worked, and 43 percent had a monthly income of less than \$1,100. Three-fourths of the parents had trouble finding affordable, satisfactory child care. Parents reported a need for a diverse range of child care services:

- 44 percent needed infant and toddler child care;
- 74 percent needed care for children 5 and under;
- 31 percent needed care for children over 5;
- 38 percent needed care for school age children during school breaks;
- 63 percent needed late afternoon/evening care (Polakow and Ziefert 2002).

A survey of parents utilizing child care services at the Borough of Manhattan Community College found that over 70 percent said that child care services are necessary for them to remain enrolled (Scott-Croff 2009).

Child care is not only necessary for many parents to enroll in college classes; it is also a critical support in helping them succeed once they are there. One study of community college students found that 89 percent of student parents utilizing child care benefits also cited indirect benefits of that care as important to their school success. These included the opportunity to meet other student parents and the availability of support related to challenges of parenting. Notably, the success rate of student parents who had access to campus child care was a full 26 percent higher than the general student population (Fadale and Winter 1988).

Reliably tracking or evaluating the benefit of child care services for student parents is difficult. The primary difficulty is the task of verifying which students are parents of dependent children in the student body, how many of those students utilize child care services, and how students utilizing child care services compare to those that do not utilize child care services. Most institutions do not maintain records of their students' status as parents of dependent children, and although some child care centers maintain records of student persistence and graduation—especially those that report these statistics for the purposes of federal child care grants—many centers do not keep detailed records.

The Current State of Campus Child Care in the U.S.

Despite the critical role of child care in serving student parents, IWPR analyses have found that campus-based children's centers meets very little of the need of student parents for child care. Utilizing data from the National Center for Education Statistics and an IWPR survey of members of the National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers, we estimated both the current need for child care among student parents in postsecondary settings and the current supply of care.

Table 2. Need for and Supply of Child Care at Postsecondary Institutions Nationally, by Institution Type

	Community Colleges	Four Year Institutions	All Postsecondary Institutions
Number of Single Parents	920,000	520,000	1,860,000
Children of Single Parents Needing Care	391,000	261,000	889,000
Needing Full Time Care	101,000	104,000	321,000
Needing Half Time Care	290,000	156,000	568,000
Slots to Fully Serve Children of Single Parents	246,000	183,000	605,000
Number of Married Parents	1,012,000	657,000	1,875,000
Children of Married Parents Needing Care	351,000	267,000	732,000
Needing Full Time Care	66,000	83,000	205,000
Needing Half Time Care	285,000	184,000	526,000
Slots to Fully Serve Children of Married Parents	209,000	175,000	469,000
Slots Needed to Fully Serve All Student Parents	455,000	357,000	1,074,000
Number of Current Centers	565	543	1,192
Slots per Center	104	111	107
Proportion of Slots for Children of Students	53.5%	34.1%	44.0%
Current Available Slots for Children of Students	31,400	20,600	56,300

We found that the supply of care—or a capacity of about 56,300 children served per week—only meets about 5 percent of the care needed by student parents enrolled nationwide. The remainder of care is provided at off-campus care facilities, by family, friends, or neighbors, or some children may be left to fend for themselves at a young age. The long waiting lists seen at most centers—the average center surveyed by IWPR had a waiting list 85 percent as large again as its actual capacity—suggest that the current demand for on-campus center-based care is much larger than the supply.

The CUNY child care services website notes that they serve 1,600 parents and 2,400 children. Once again, although comparability of the data between the CUNY system and IWPR’s national analysis is uncertain, we can roughly estimate the extent to which CUNY’s services meet the need of its parents. Of the 44,000 student parents that we estimate are enrolled at CUNY, not all will need care and others will need only part time care, varying by age of child and availability of a stay-at-home spouse to provide care. We estimate a need equivalent to full time child care services for 11,500 parents; if CUNY serves 1,600 parents, it is meeting at most 14 percent of the need for child care services among its student parent population. However, student parents may have access to off-campus care options, including family, friend, or neighbor care, and may prefer such options. More data is needed regarding the student parent population and the extent

to which parents prefer on-campus care in order to make any specific recommendations regarding child care capacity at campus centers, but waiting lists provide some indication of the unmet need for care.

Despite the inability of the campus-based child care services to meet the capacity needs of student parents, the proportion of institutions providing on-campus care is actually decreasing. The proportion of community colleges and four-year schools reporting that they have on-campus child care available to students has decreased slightly from 53 percent of institutions in 2001 to 50 percent of institutions in 2008, with decreases occurring at both two and four year institutions. Anecdotal evidence from IWPR's surveys of experts and center staff suggest that this trend has likely continued or worsened through 2009 and 2010, with more services being cut and centers closing due to the effects of the major economic recession that began in December 2007.

Both the Obama administration and groups like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have stated that they are working to substantially increase the number of Americans receiving postsecondary credentials. Given that student parents make up fully one-fourth of undergraduate students, the trend toward reducing or eliminating campus child care services may indicate that maintaining or increasing student parent enrollment will be extremely difficult.

Directions for Campus Child Care and Student Parent Supports

IWPR's research revealed that institutions apply a wide array of strategies in their mission to serve student parents. Campus children's centers are funded and administered in many different ways, and many have implemented unique strategies for extending services, improving supports for parents, or gathering support from the institution, the community, or government sources.

An IWPR report forthcoming at the end of this year will present detailed findings of our study of child care at postsecondary institutions, as well as exploring best practices and recommendations for the continued improvement and expansion of child care and other services for student parents.

In addition to the forthcoming report, IWPR has just launched a new project on student parents. The goal of this new project is to foster communication and collaboration among those who serve student parents, education researchers, postsecondary institution administrators, and policymakers in order to improve student parent persistence and success as they pursue postsecondary credentials. In order to further the agenda of increasing student parent access, retention, and completion in postsecondary education, we will be launching a new project website with informational resources, holding meetings and convenings of stakeholders, commissioning research, and creating toolkits and trainings.

I welcome any questions or comments from the committee at this time, and I would be happy to correspond further regarding my testimony, IWPR's forthcoming report, and our new project on networking stakeholders working to advance student parent success. Please feel free to contact me at miller@iwpr.org or to call IWPR at (202) 785-5100. Thank you again for the opportunity to share our findings and discuss this important issue.