

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-522](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Student parents face many challenges, including paying for child care, that can make it difficult for them to complete a degree. The federal government supports student parents through Education's CCAMPIS program, which provides colleges funding for child care services, and federal student aid, which can also help students pay for child care. GAO was asked to provide information on student parents and the federal programs that support these students.

This report examines, among other objectives, what is known about the characteristics and degree completion of undergraduate students with children; what is known about the CCAMPIS program and how reliable Education's reported outcomes are; and to what extent selected schools publicize the option to increase federal student aid to help pay for child care. GAO analyzed 2009 and 2016 federal student data (the most recent available) and CCAMPIS program performance data, reviewed how the 62 schools that were awarded CCAMPIS grants in 2017 publicized the student aid option to help pay for child care, and reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and agency documents. GAO interviewed officials from Education and selected schools.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to Education to correct its CCAMPIS persistence and graduation rate calculations and to encourage schools to inform students about the option to increase federal student aid to help pay for child care. Education disagreed with GAO's recommendations, but described plans to improve its performance calculations. GAO continues to believe additional actions are warranted.

View [GAO-19-522](#). For more information, contact Melissa Emrey-Arras at (617) 788-0534 or emreyarrasm@gao.gov.

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HIGHER EDUCATION

More Information Could Help Student Parents Access Additional Federal Student Aid

What GAO Found

More than one in five undergraduate students were raising children, and about half of student parents left school without a degree, according to Department of Education (Education) data. In 2015-2016, an estimated 22 percent of undergraduates (4.3 million of 19.5 million) were parents. An estimated 55 percent of student parents were single parents, 44 percent were working full-time while enrolled, and 64 percent attended school part-time. Undergraduate student parents had fewer financial resources to fund their education than students without children. Nearly half of student parents reported paying for child care, with monthly costs averaging about \$490. A higher percentage of student parents left school without a degree (52 percent) compared to students without children (32 percent) as of 2009 (the most recent data available).



About 56 percent of undergraduate student parents had a child age 5 or younger in school year 2015-16.

Source: GAO file photo. | GAO-19-522

Education's Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program helped about 3,300 students pay child care costs for about 4,000 children in 2016-2017. Another 4,200 children were on waiting lists to receive assistance. Most CCAMPIS participants paid some child care fees after receiving subsidies—the median payment each month was about \$160. Education measures participants' persistence in school and graduation rate to assess the performance of the CCAMPIS program. However, flaws in its calculations of these two measures prevented Education from reporting reliable results, making it difficult for Education and Congress to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Some student parents could be eligible to increase their federal student loans to help pay for child care by asking their schools to include an allowance for dependent care expenses in their financial aid calculations. However, schools do not always publicize this allowance to current and prospective students. GAO reviewed the websites—where schools post other college cost information—of schools serving student parents and found that about two-thirds of these websites did not mention the allowance. Schools are not required—and Education does not encourage them—to inform student parents about the allowance. As a result, eligible student parents may be unaware of this option to request additional financial support to help them complete their degree.