

CHILDCARE ACCESS MEANS Parents in School Programs and Experiences

Community college leaders reflect on their experiences as childcare grant recipients.

By Sean Robins

ONE IN FIVE UNDERGRADUATE COLLEGE STUDENTS today is a parent, yet they are 10 times less likely to graduate. Many institutions of higher education are challenged with supporting students that need childcare to stay engaged with their education. When looking at rural institutions, there are usually one or two individuals, or a small team wearing multiple hats, tasked with supporting students through the institution's student services department.

The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program supports the participation of low-income parents in postsecondary education through the provision of campus-based childcare services. Funds are used to support or establish campus-based childcare programs primarily serving the needs of low-income students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Grants may be used for before- and after-school services. Grants may also be used to serve the childcare needs of the community served by the institution. For rural communities, a community college's campus-based childcare center is often the only available

childcare in the area. Therefore, the services that they provide not only support the institution and students enrolled, but the community overall.

The needs are great. Many childcare centers across the U.S. lost a significant portion of their staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many are diligently working to keep their doors open and provide these essential services to their communities. Childcare and early childhood education are pivotal wraparound services that allow institutions to recruit and retain student parents so they are able to obtain the necessary certification or degree to set them and their families up in family sustaining jobs.

ACCT recently hosted an online Peer Learning Network Discussion that included Central Arizona College, Grays Harbor College in Washington, Highland Community College in Illinois, Lake Tahoe Community College in California, Lakeshore Technical College in Wisconsin, Mount Wachusett Community College in Massachusetts, and Wor-Wic Community College in Maryland. Here, we feature insights from these institutions and reflections on their experiences as CCAMPIS recipients.



Lessons Learned and Suggestions to Improve the CCAMPIS Application Process

CCAMPIS grant recipients from the network discussed lessons learned from the grant experience, including the importance of networking with other CCAMPIS peers, being able to pivot when needed to adapt to changing circumstances, and modeling campus-based childcare programs on other successful programs. The opportunity to gain experience from others who are or were previous CCAMPIS recipients allows institutions to share knowledge and resources on how to complete the grant application and set up their campus-based childcare programs.

A key lesson learned during the COVID-19 pandemic was to be ready to pivot and adapt to an ever-changing environment, as the pandemic required institutions and childcare centers to shift quickly given the circumstances. CCAMPIS grant recipients should ensure that they are staying in touch with their grant officers if or when changes need to occur. Also, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, many childcare centers closed, and institutions that were CCAMPIS grant recipients had to reevaluate their sliding fee scales for campus-based childcare. Some rural institutions also indicated that they encountered challenges in spending the CCAMPIS grant funds throughout the pandemic after closing and shifting their operations. Currently, institutions are eligible to apply for up to 3 percent of program funding in comparison to 1 percent previously. This is made possible in part by the additional funding that was provided to education programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The rural institutions attending our PLN discussion stressed that when an institution is creating campus-based childcare, it should not try to reinvent the wheel. There are plenty of successful childcare and campus-based childcare programs on which new programs can be modeled. This can help support the development of the institution's sliding fee scale to support students who have the highest need and limited means.

There are many challenges that rural community colleges face providing childcare. The institutions during this PLN discussion indicated that one of the initial challenges during the application process was gathering data on student parents at their institutions. Many did not have the data readily available to understand the scope of their student population. While each institution echoed that they were able to learn more about their students throughout this process, having data on which students are enrolled is essential to providing needed wraparound services.

Completing the CCAMPIS application can be an arduous process for the limited funding made available, especially for rural community colleges with limited staff. For rural community colleges, the CCAMPIS application process feels like "keeping your head above water" due to the length of the application, participants said. One rural community college estimated that 240 administrative hours were dedicated to completing the CCAMPIS application. For rural institutions that do not have dedicated staff grant writers, this is a heavy burden. To improve the CCAMPIS application, recognizing the challenges faced by rural communities related to staffing and funding will allow for necessary improvements.

An additional recommendation to improve CCAMPIS is to potentially expand the use of funds outside of specifically accredited programs. Greater transparency will also allow potential grant awardees to have a better understanding of CCAMPIS. Many speakers said that watching

the Campus-Based Childcare webinar that the ACCT Center for Policy and Practice held in November 2022 helped them navigate the process. The webinar helps answer many questions about CCAMPIS, and even institutions which already receive CCAMPIS funding stated that they were able to learn more about the program.

To help improve CCAMPIS and childcare, participating institutions indicated the need for systematic change, including providing additional support for the accreditation process and the current low wages within the childcare and early childhood education field. Providing additional support for the accreditation process can ensure that childcare centers are meeting the necessary standards for quality childcare. Also, institutions must continue to bring awareness around the community service that is childcare and the professionals that work in the field. Many of these individuals are from low-income, underrepresented, and first-generation backgrounds, and wages often are not family sustaining.

Central Arizona College

Central Arizona College, located in Coolidge, Arizona, has been serving students since 1967. The county that the college serves is one of the state's most economically deprived, and Arizona ranks 45th nationwide in the overall well-being of children and 46th in providing supportive communities that nurture families and children. These were among the reasons why Central Arizona College decided to apply for CCAMPIS. The average age of the college's students is around 27, and 64% of students are eligible for Pell Grants.

As of September 30, 2022, Central Arizona College had completed its final year of four-year CCAMPIS funding. The college had two priorities for the CCAMPIS grant: (1) provide tuition subsidies for on campus childcare, and (2) provide family engagement opportunities that would assist parents. Since accreditation is a requirement for the CCAMPIS grant, Central Arizona worked with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). There were on-campus childcare centers at two of the college's five campuses, staffed by contract providers. Unfortunately, since the COVID-19 pandemic, Central Arizona is down to only one childcare center, which is on the main campus.

The CCAMPIS grant allowed the institution to discover more about its students and their needs. This data allowed Central Arizona College to inform its practices and services and improve the quality of strategies supporting students. Additionally, it helped focus the institution in maintaining quality markers for early childhood and childcare in the state.

After the COVID-19 pandemic started, the institution ended up having to pay for staff salaries, which was not initially part of the plan. The college was able to hire a coordinator that supported the centers' accreditation, but because it used a contracted provider there were some barriers. Since the coordinator was not a part of the campus, the needs of the students were not understood the way an on-campus staff member would, which made it difficult to implement some of the strategies that college leaders were hoping to put forth. The college's provider is a nonprofit organization, and the grant funding for CCAMPIS is not enough to support the holistic approach needed to implement all the services that will best serve students and families while maintaining quality, college leaders said.

Grays Harbor College

Grays Harbor College, located in Aberdeen, Washington, serves a district that is 97% rural. An outside vendor operates the institution's campus-based childcare, where the college subsidizes childcare for students. The college leverages its in-house grant writer to support grant applications. The sliding fee scale at the college would have individuals pay some portion of the childcare if they did not qualify for the program. However, due to the need for childcare and the number of individuals that applied for funding, the institution did not have to implement the sliding fee scale.

In preparing for the grant application, the college focused on finding data that demonstrated the need for childcare. What the institution found was that there was a greater need for childcare around the proximity of the institution. Overall, college leaders said that while receiving a CCAMPIS grant can really help the institution, losing out on a potential opportunity in the following grant cycle can be very disappointing. A lesson learned from Grays Harbor College is to be explicit in responding to every prompt in the CCAMPIS grant application.

Highland Community College

Highland Community College, located in the northwest corner of Illinois, is in a rural district which spans four counties. Over the last decade, the region's population has declined. Like other rural community colleges, access to childcare is a regional economic challenge.

As a small institution, Highland has the flexibility to try new approaches to working through various challenges. Highland has a longstanding 50-year partnership agreement with the YMCA, which is located on its campus. Over the last 20 years, Highland has developed a childcare facility which is located next to a shared YMCA and academic building. This facility is fully operated by the YMCA and houses the institution's early childhood education program. It includes observation rooms which allow ECE students to observe and work directly within the facility.

Although Highland Community College does not have a dedicated grant writer on campus, its leaders were able to learn about the CCAMPIS opportunity from Illinois Senator Tammy Duckworth during a roundtable and shortly after gathered the data needed to submit its application. Highland Community College received its CCAMPIS grant not long before the COVID-19 pandemic began, which had a large impact on the institution just as Highland was beginning to spread awareness of its campus based childcare program.

Through the partnership with the YMCA, hours were extended, allowing evening nursing students to take advantage of campus-based childcare. However, as Highland Community College is working to rebuild its enrollment by attracting students that either stopped out or did not continue with enrollment during the pandemic, the institution's daycare has been unable to scale up its employment to pre-pandemic levels, limiting the number of students that can be served.

Lake Tahoe Community College

Lake Tahoe Community College (LTCC), located in South Lake Tahoe, California, provides campus-based childcare through its Child Development Center (CDC). The LTCC CDC serves a maximum of 46 children – six

infants, 10 toddlers, and 30 preschoolers. The childcare for LTCC students and low-income families is offered at low to no cost while offering full and half-day options, which makes it more flexible for families. Additionally, the LTCC CDC provides hands-on employment experience for students pursuing Early Childhood Education and flexible on-campus jobs for any student interested in working with children.

While the LTCC CDC is more expensive than other providers in the area, students pay less for infant and toddler care and have priority access to those spots. The center established a sliding fee scale where community members are charged the most, followed by LTCC employees, and then students who are charged the lowest amount. Fees have not risen since LTCC has been a CCAMPIS recipient. Additionally, LTCC is a recipient of two California state grants which also help the institution to support low-income students, resulting in student parents paying low or no fees at the center.

In preparation for submitting its CCAMPIS application, LTCC hired a grant writer and interviewed the LTCC CDC staff, college leadership, and student services personnel to gain a better understanding of where the institution's services stood. Following these conversations, LTCC developed a plan to implement evening childcare to provide a new option for student parents who worked different shifts in various service industries.

Throughout the CCAMPIS application and implementation process, LTCC learned that plans do not always work out. For example, when campuses shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the college's plans to offer evening campus-based childcare never took off. Therefore, midway through the grant period, LTCC reached out to its grant officer to shift this goal to allocating more funds for the daytime teaching staff where there was a higher need, allowing the college to serve additional students who were on the waitlist. LTCC recommends that colleges should adjust as needed and be willing to identify how they can best serve students, even if those needs shift. Additionally, utilizing funds to staff centers when students need childcare most and recalibrating student fees for CCAMPIS eligible students can ensure successful implementation, LTCC leaders said.

Lakeshore Technical College

Lakeshore Technical College is located along the coast of Lake Michigan in Cleveland, Wisconsin, serving four counties. The college serves about 9,000 students (2,500 degree seeking), of whom 85% are part-time. Many students do not complete the FAFSA, which presented a challenge for the institution, as it was only able to apply for a \$30,000 CCAMPIS grant representing 1% of an institution's Pell Grant recipients. The college has found that it has far greater needs than what the CCAMPIS grant covers, and there are more students that need support. About 40% of the student body are student parents, and the college's students tend to be low-income.

Lakeshore Technical College provides childcare through its on campus childcare center. The center serves those 2-12 years old, but primarily serves as a preschool. The childcare center accepts full and part time children and accommodates drop-ins if space is available. It is only open in the day and not available in the summer.

Through the CCAMPIS grant application and implementation, the institution began to understand its student population even more. When

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applying for the CCAMPIS grant, Lakeshore Technical College was able to leverage its network to receive grant writing guidance from other CCAMPIS recipients at other institutions. A lesson learned was that requiring a semester of college completion to be eligible for CCAMPIS and even a nominal fee for childcare created barriers to college entry and completion. Therefore, Lakeshore shifted to ensure that individuals with a zero Estimated Family Contribution (EFC) pay nothing. The college also now requires students to have only one month of academic progress to be eligible for childcare.

Mount Wachusett Community College

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC), located in Gardner, Massachusetts, enrolls approximately 4,000 students and has been a CCAMPIS recipient for 16 years — representing four different grant cycles. MWCC serves about 29 towns and has recently been seeing more students coming from Boston and the Worcester area to enroll in the institution's selective health and nursing programs. MWCC's campus-based childcare is provided through the on campus childcare center and facilitated by an outside organization. The childcare center has two preschool classrooms and serves 39 children of preschool age from 2.9 to five years old.

MWCC has a grant development professional who led and facilitated its team through a 10-month grant development writing process for its CCAMPIS grant. The student services team at MWCC supports the CCAMPIS implementation, as the institution knows that it has to look after both the student parent and the child. From the implementation of the CCAMPIS grant, the institution has worked with both its on-campus preschool and off-campus providers, including before and after school programs.

Like other rural institutions, MWCC has also been able to learn more about its student population through CCAMPIS. MWCC leveraged the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit, which gave staff more insights about the college's student parents and their needs. Through this toolkit and survey, MWCC learned that student parents wanted a place on campus that they could gather with other student parents, which led to MWCC creating its Family Resource Center and recently launching a Child Watch Program. Through this program, federal work study students who are early childhood education majors are able to staff the program. One of the lessons learned is to make sure that an institution is spending the funds in a way that ensures students are enrolling, persisting, and graduating.

Wor-Wic Community College

Wor-Wic Community College, located on Maryland's Eastern Shore in Salisbury, Maryland, serves three rural counties and enrolls 3,662 credit

student and 2,983 non-credit students. Its student population consists of 83% part-time students, and the college has the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipient students of the 16 community colleges in the state of Maryland. Wor-Wic Community College's Child Development Center opened in 2006 and is a Maryland EXCELS Level 5 childcare facility, which is the highest level in Maryland. The center serves children ages 2-5 years old and can support up to 79 children. Additionally, the center provides pre-kindergarten for ages 3 and 4, as well as a summer program known as Camp Jordan for ages 5-12. Wor-Wic Community College also leverages the Child Development Center for its early childcare and education programs and allows students to gain experience through clinical rotations.

Wor-Wic Community College has been a CCAMPIS grant recipient for two grant cycles. A focus within the CCAMPIS grant application and implementation was to view this grant not only as a way to support childcare on campus, but also to help retain students and help them continue their education through graduation. The design of Wor-Wic Community College's CCAMPIS program includes a part-time CCAMPIS advisor, costs to pursue national accreditation, workshop materials, travel, and parent packs. Due to the initial funding which was based on 1% of Pell funds, the campus-based childcare program was small and did not serve many students. As a result, there were challenges in finding an employee who was willing to work 12 hours per week to help staff the campus-based childcare. An additional challenge that Wor-Wic Community College faced was the process for obtaining national accreditation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. While the institution's Child Development Center has the advantage of being located on campus and has the support to understand the accreditation process, many local providers of childcare in the area do not have this capacity nor understanding of the accreditation process.

This is an abridged version of a more extensive article published in ACCT's online publication ACCT NOW. Please visit NOW.ACCT.org to learn more about how colleges across the country are attracting and retaining more students through supporting student parents.



Sean Robins is the policy associate leading the Strengthening Rural Community Colleges Initiative to convene rural community college leaders while providing technical support, assistance, and resources on federal policy and advocacy. Learn more at www.acct.org/page/strengthening-rural-community-colleges.