

Advancing Opportunity

Parents' Solutions to Georgia's Child Care Challenges



Recommendations for Higher Education

Child care challenges can prove disruptive, not only to parents' workforce participation, but to their enrollment in postsecondary and work training programs as well. These challenges can have far-reaching effects for families, employers, and Georgia's economy as a whole. Starting in 2018, GEEARS: Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students and the Metro Atlanta Chamber set out to better understand the prevalence, nature, and impact of child care challenges through a survey and series of focus groups with parents of young children in Georgia. **The results are alarming.**



Almost a Quarter

of parents had turned down an opportunity to enroll in school or work training **because of child care challenges**



46%

of parents currently enrolled in post-secondary education reported having **missed school** in the past 6 months **due to child care issues**

Parents described a range of challenges that led to such disruptions, including a lack of family-friendly campus policies and support systems (e.g., accessible and affordable child care options). These challenges can also interfere with the successful completion of postsecondary programs, preventing parents from advancing their careers and increasing their family's economic stability.

These findings underscore the need for stakeholders, specifically institutions of higher education, policymakers, and employers, to work together to address such challenges. The campus and policy solutions below—vetted by parents themselves—outline opportunities for institutions of higher education to help alleviate the specific challenges that student parents face.

"I want to go back [to school], but I just don't have the time between working fulltime and 24/7 parent[ing]."

- Mother from Columbus, GA

"It's going to drive the economy. That's the end-all of getting a degree and making more money - spend it into the economy."

- Father from Atlanta, GA



Recent Win for Families

In June 2020, the allowable activities for parents and caregivers participating in Georgia's child care subsidy program, Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS), which provides scholarships that help some low-income working families in Georgia afford child care, were expanded to include participation toward a four-year-degree.

Higher Education Solutions

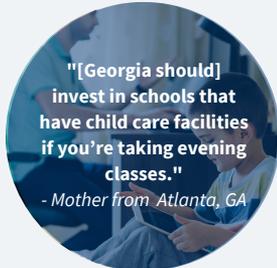
Better Identify Student Parents

To better support student parents, institutions of higher education must be able to accurately identify such students and to evaluate their individual needs. Although the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a helpful tool to gauge how many and which students serve as a primary caregiver of a child, many institutions do not have access to additional data on student parents, such as the age and number of dependent children.ⁱ

Recommendation: *Build upon existing data systems to better identify student parents and their needs in order to develop and implement solutions that support such students.*

Provide Child Care Services

High-quality child care services help parents enroll in and successfully complete postsecondary education, with on-campus child care being one of parents' most cited solutions to addressing challenges to postsecondary attainment. Georgia ranks 46th in the nation for providing on-campus child care at public two- and four-year degree institutions, with only 21% offering this support.ⁱⁱ If onsite child care is not an option, campuses can create systems to refer student parents to nearby child care that meets their needs. Campuses could also provide scholarships or fee vouchers toward child care costs at on-campus or nearby child care programs.



"[Georgia should] invest in schools that have child care facilities if you're taking evening classes."

- Mother from Atlanta, GA

Recommendation: *Provide child care services and/or supports, such as onsite or near-site child care, referrals, subsidies for child care, and back-up or emergency child care.*

Create Family-Friendly Campuses

Institutions should consider implementing policies and support systems that accommodate the needs of student parents and their families at times and locations that are convenient. For example, flexible scheduling, online classes, or distance education were commonly cited as helpful solutions by focus group participants. Student parents' needs may include some type of wraparound and/or academic support services, such as tutoring, financial aid assistance, career services, and health care. In addition, campuses can develop dedicated spaces and resources to support student parents and expecting parents (e.g., family housing, peer support groups).

Recommendation: *Create family-friendly campuses by offering classes and supports that meet the needs of student parents.*

Increase Cross-Agency Collaboration

Georgia's state agencies tasked with postsecondary education and workforce development should explore partnerships with Georgia's child-serving state agencies to better support working families. These partnerships are critical in helping the state find innovative, efficient solutions to support working families and strengthen the state's economy.

Recommendation: *Strengthen partnerships between postsecondary and workforce systems, and child-serving state agencies, to foster the success of student parents and their families.*

Moving Forward

The impact of child care challenges is significant and felt by Georgia families, employers, higher education institutions, work training programs, and the state as a whole. By adopting a two-generation approach—considering the workforce of today and tomorrow—Georgia's institutions of higher education can move the needle for the state's families and bolster the economy.

For more information and to read the full report, visit: www.OpportunitiesLost.org

i. The Aspen Institute, "Accelerating Postsecondary Success for Parents: Leveraging the Two-Generation Approach in Policy," November 2018.

ii. Eleanor Eckerson, "Child care for parents in college: A state-by-state assessment." (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2018).