

Title: Childcare Constraints, Campus-Based Support, and Adult Student Success: New Evidence on CCAMPIS in U.S. Public Higher Education

Research Overview

This study examines how local childcare costs and campus-based childcare supports shape adult student success in U.S. public higher education. Using national administrative data, it analyzes whether childcare constraints are associated with enrollment patterns and whether CCAMPIS funding is targeted to institutions to address gaps in support for student-parents.

Purpose of Study

Student-parents comprise roughly one in five undergraduates in the United States, yet access to affordable and reliable childcare remains highly unequal across communities and campuses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Malik et al., 2018). At the same time, campus-based childcare has declined over the years, limiting one of the few institutional supports directly responsive to student-parent needs (Eckerson et al., 2016). Across public colleges, the share offering campus-based childcare fell from 54% in 2005 to 40% in 2023, and fewer than 10% of student-parents are estimated to access these services (Eckerson et al., 2016; Dayne et al., 2023). These constraints show that student-parents are less likely to persist and complete degrees than similar non-parenting peers, even though their academic performance is often comparable or stronger in course-based measures (Kruvelis et al., 2017; Sick et al., 2023).

This paper addresses a gap in higher education research by treating childcare not simply as a family support issue, but as a factor tied to adult student enrollment and institutional opportunity structures. It focuses on the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, the only federal childcare program specifically targeted to postsecondary student-parents. Because CCAMPIS funding increased from \$15 million in 2017 to \$75 million in 2023, the program offers a timely opportunity to examine whether federal childcare investments are reaching institutions operating under greater childcare constraints. The study is grounded in human capital theory and the theory of time poverty in higher education, which together suggest that reducing caregiving and financial constraints can expand students' capacity to enroll, persist, and invest more fully in college (Wladis et al., 2018).

Although CCAMPIS is a U.S.-based policy, childcare access, adult learning, and postsecondary participation are also internationally relevant. In the Asia-Pacific region, including

Taiwan, affordable childcare capacity has been expanded, subsidies have been increased, and preschool fees have been reduced as part of a national response to declining birth rates and family caregiving pressures (Executive Yuan, 2026; Ministry of Education, Republic of China [Taiwan], 2025). By examining childcare constraints in U.S. higher education, this study contributes to broader conversations about how institutions can support adult learners and student-parents across national contexts.

Research Methods

The study uses a national longitudinal design, combining institution-level data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System with county-level data from the National Database of Child Care Prices, spanning 2008 to 2023. The analytic sample includes U.S. public colleges and universities and focuses on adult student outcomes: total adult enrollment, full-time and part-time enrollment, completion, and campus-based childcare provision. Institutional CCAMPIS recipients and funding histories are derived from federal reports.

Two complementary strategies guide the analysis. First, county fixed-effects models estimate the relationship between local childcare costs and adult student outcomes while controlling for time-invariant county characteristics, year effects, and changing economic conditions. Second, a quasi-experimental difference-in-differences design with staggered treatment timing examines whether CCAMPIS funding is associated with changes in adult enrollment and campus-based childcare provision at funded institutions relative to never-funded and not-yet-funded institutions. This component applies to a dynamic estimator that accounts for treatment heterogeneity over time (De Chaisemartin & d'Haultfoeuille, 2024). The study is further informed by a public-facing mapping component that links childcare affordability, regional demographics, campus childcare centers, and CCAMPIS grantees across the United States.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary findings show that childcare affordability is strongly associated with adult student enrollment. An additional \$100 in average county center-based childcare cost is associated with approximately 126 fewer adult enrollments, representing about a 4.2 percentage-point decline from baseline. This negative association is concentrated among part-time adult students and appears especially pronounced for adult women and community college students, suggesting that childcare constraints may shape both whether adults enroll and the terms under

which they can participate in higher education. These patterns suggest that childcare affordability functions as a structural barrier, not merely a private family issue, in public higher education.

Preliminary descriptive comparisons also suggest that CCAMPIS-funded institutions are disproportionately located in areas with higher childcare costs and somewhat higher surrounding median income, indicating that grants may be reaching campuses operating in relatively constrained local childcare markets. In addition, CCAMPIS institutions appear to enroll more racially diverse student bodies than non-CCAMPIS institutions. Early event-study analyses are designed to test whether receipt of a grant is followed by positive shifts in adult enrollment and campus childcare provision. Together, these findings position childcare as a central component of postsecondary opportunity rather than a peripheral student service.

Keywords

student-parents; childcare; adult students; CCAMPIS; higher education

References

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