

# Briefing Paper



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## Child Care for Parents in College: A State-by-State Assessment

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Child care is a crucial support for the 4.8 million parents in college, but it is difficult for students to find and afford. Balancing the responsibilities of school, family, and work, student parents with young children rely on affordable, reliable child care arrangements to manage the many demands on their time while pursuing a postsecondary credential (Gault et al. 2014). Much of student parents' need for care goes unmet, however, contributing to their low rates of degree attainment: only one-third attain a degree or certificate within six years of enrollment (Gault et al. 2014; Miller, Gault, and Thorman 2011). For many of the parents who leave school without earning a credential, better access to child care could have helped them avoid taking a break or dropping out completely (Hess et al. 2014; Johnson et al. 2009).

Student parents' ability to find and pay for child care varies by state. Differences in the availability of child care on college campuses and in the restrictiveness of state eligibility rules for child care assistance means that many student parents have limited access to the services they need to complete school. This briefing paper analyzes data from the U.S. Department of Education on the share of public institutions that provide campus child care, and reviews current state child care subsidy rules, to assess state variation in the challenges facing student parents' access to affordable, quality child care.

### Declining Campus Child Care

Campus child care centers can help meet the care needs of student parents by providing them with a source of quality, reliable child care where they attend classes. A study at Monroe Community College (MCC) of the effect of campus child care access on student parents' academic outcomes illustrates the important role it can play in parents' postsecondary success (Monroe Community College 2013). MCC students with children under the age of six who used the campus child care center were more likely to return to school the following year than their counterparts who did not use the child care center (68 percent, compared with 51 percent). Parents who used child care were also nearly three times more likely to graduate or go on to pursue a B.A. within 3 years of enrollment (41 percent, compared with only 15 percent; Monroe Community College 2013).

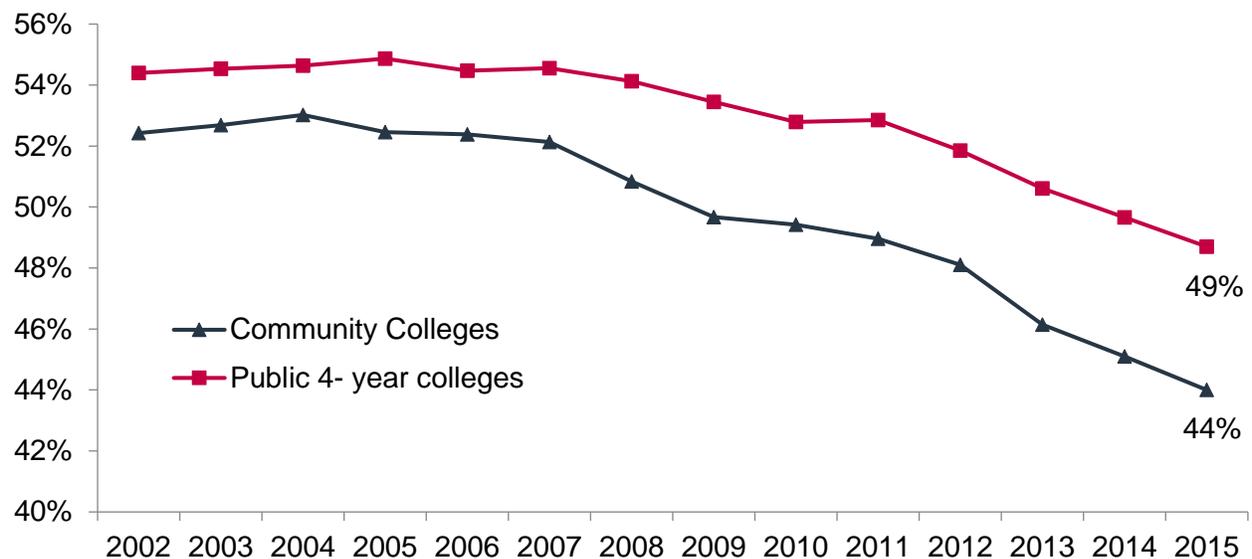
Despite the important role that child care can play in student parents' postsecondary success, campus child care meets only a small fraction of student parents' increasing need. In the United States, the number of student parents increased from 3.2 million in 1995 to 4.8 million in 2012 (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2015). A large share of student parents are single mothers (43 percent), the majority of whom live with low-incomes (89 percent; Institute for Women's Policy Research 2016c). Mothers in college are also disproportionately likely to be women of color. Nearly half of all Black

women, one-third of Hispanic women, and two-fifths of Native American and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander women, are student mothers (Gault et al. 2014).

Campus child care centers typically have much higher demand than they can meet. A 2016 survey of nearly 100 campus children’s center leaders conducted by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR) found that 95 percent of centers at two- and four-year schools across the country maintained a waiting list with an average of 82 children (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2016a).

Despite the growing need for student parent supports, campus child care centers have been closing across the country. In 2015, less than half of four-year public colleges provided campus child care, down from 55 percent in 2003-05 (Figure 1). The share of community colleges reporting the presence of a campus child care center declined more sharply—from 53 percent in 2003-04, to 44 percent in 2015 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The Share of Two- and Four-Year Public Institutions with Campus Child Care Centers, 2002-2015**



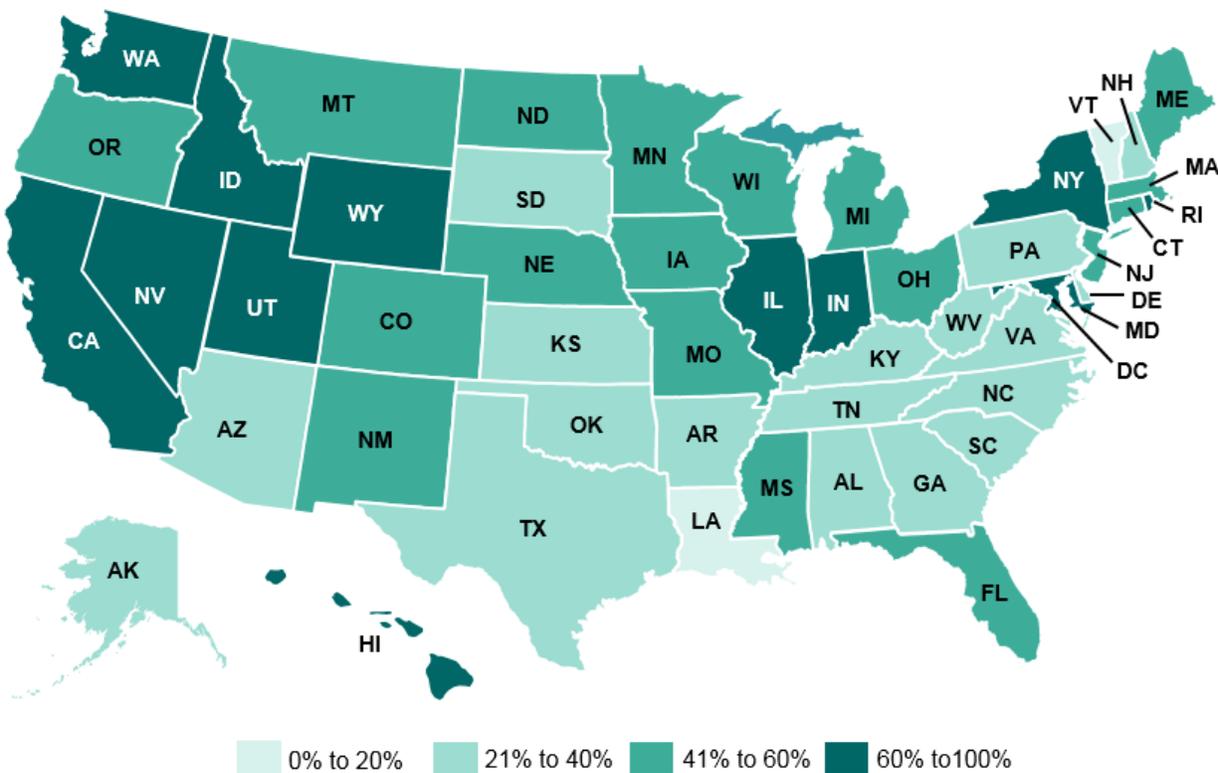
Source: IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2002-15 Institutional Characteristics Component (2002-2013 Final Revised Release; 2014 Provisional Release; 2015 Preliminary Release).<sup>1</sup>

Between 2005 and 2015, campus child care declined at community colleges and public four-year institutions in 36 states (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2016b). The share of institutions with campus child care remained the same in 13 states and the District of Columbia; and one state—North Dakota—saw a 17 percent increase (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2016b). More states reported declining rates of child care on community college campuses (36) than at public four-year institutions (24) during this time period—a particularly concerning trend due to the large share of student parents enrolled in community colleges (Institute for Women’s Policy Research 2016b; Gault et al. 2014).

<sup>1</sup> Community colleges are defined as publicly-affiliated institutions granting associate's degrees; 4-year public colleges are defined as publicly-affiliated institutions awarding bachelor's degrees. Includes U.S. mainland states, U.S. service academies and other U.S. jurisdictions.

State-by-state analysis of the share of institutions that offer campus child care reveals wide geographic variation in availability (Map 1). The table in Appendix A details the share of public two- and four-year institutions with campus child care by state, and provides rankings based on each state's share of public institutions with campus child care. While ranking states by their share of institutions with campus child care provides insight into the distribution of child care coverage for student parents across the country, rankings must be understood in the context of the total number of public institutions in each state. Rhode Island, for example, had the highest percentage of schools with a campus child care center in 2015 (100 percent), but it only has three public colleges in the state (one 2-year and two 4-year institutions). Utah and Idaho were also highly ranked; both states have a small number of institutions overall (in both, six out of each state's eight institutions have campus child care; Appendix A).

**Map 1. The Shares of Public Two- and Four-Year Institutions with Campus Child Care by State, 2015**



Source: IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS). 2015 Institutional Characteristics Component (2015 Preliminary Release).

Of the one-third of states with the most public institutions of higher education (33 schools or more), California, New York, Illinois, and Washington have the best child care coverage for their student parents, with three-quarters or more of their two- and four-year colleges having a campus child care center. California and New York have the highest coverage, at more than 80 percent each (Appendix A). In contrast, only 38 percent of Texas' 105 two- and four-year public institutions, and 27 percent of North Carolina's 75 total institutions, provide campus child care. Vermont, ranked last, has only six institutions:

one public two-year and five public four-year institutions—and just one campus child care center (Appendix A).

## **Many States Limit College Students' Access to Child Care Assistance**

Student parents seeking community-based child care typically face prohibitively high costs. Average annual costs for full-time, center-based infant care range from \$4,822 in Mississippi to \$17,062 in Massachusetts (Child Care Aware of America 2015). On average, low-income families (who earn less than \$1,500 per month) with children under the age of 15 spend 40 percent of their average monthly income on dependent care. This is an amount that is often infeasible for student parents—nearly 70 percent of whom live with low-incomes—who also have to cover the costs of college attendance in addition to meeting basic living needs (Laughlin 2013; Institute for Women's Policy Research 2016c).

While financial assistance for low-income parents to access quality care is available through state subsidy programs funded by the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), student parents can face particular challenges getting the financial support they need due to strict subsidy eligibility rules in some states. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), governed by the CCDBG, provides formula block grants to states to provide subsidized child care to eligible low-income families. While CCDF programs must abide by federal regulations, states have the flexibility to determine their own eligibility requirements for the receipt of child care subsidies (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2016). Many states impose restrictions on the use of CCDF subsidies for parents who are enrolled in education and training; these restrictions include work requirements, limitations on degree type, eligibility time limits, and activity and academic progress requirements.

## **Child Care Subsidy Rules for Parents in Education or Training**

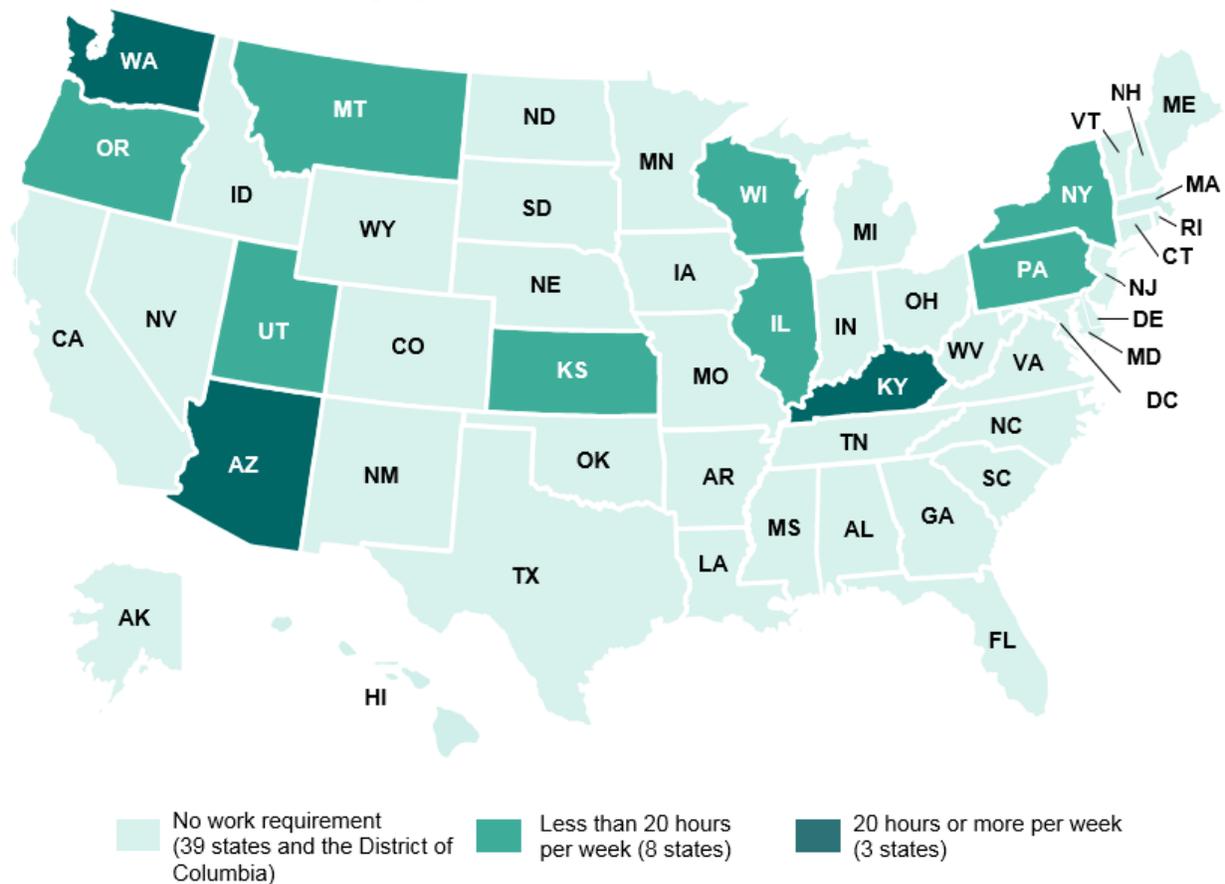
To assess state rules related to student parents' access to child care subsidies, IWPR reviewed approved 2016-18 CCDF plans, which were released in June 2016, for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, IWPR contacted the appropriate state agency to clarify plan language. A detailed table containing information on the presence of restrictions for student parents' eligibility for child care subsidies can be found in Appendix B.

IWPR's review found that 11 states require parents to work to be eligible for child care subsidies while enrolled in an education or job training program (Map 2). Three states (Arizona, Kentucky, and Washington) require parents to work at least 20 hours per week, which research has shown hurts academic performance and degree completion (Map 2; Kuh et al. 2007). Significant work hours can be particularly harmful for student parents' success: 59 percent of parents enrolled in community colleges who worked 20 or more hours per week dropped out without a degree or certificate within 6 years of enrollment, compared with 46 percent among those who worked less than 20 hours per week (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2016d).

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<sup>2</sup> All 2016-18 CCDF state plans can be found by visiting <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/state-plans>.

**Map 2. Work Requirements for Child Care Subsidy Eligibility for Parents Enrolled in Education and Training by State, 2016-18**



Source: IWPR analysis of Approved CCDF Plans (FY 2016-2018) (available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/state-plans>).

Many states also place restrictions on the type of degree a parent can earn while receiving state-funded child care subsidies, which can jeopardize their future earning power and financial security. Research demonstrates that greater educational attainment is associated with higher lifetime earnings and higher rates of employment over the lifecycle, and can have multigenerational benefits (Attewell et al. 2007; Carnevale, Rose, and Cheah 2011; Hartmann and Hayes 2013).

Nine states limit the type of degree parents can pursue while receiving subsidies to below a B.A. Seven of those states (California, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Washington, and Wisconsin) and the District of Columbia allow parents to earn only up to a vocational degree, such as a technical degree or certificate that leads directly to a trade, while receiving child care assistance (Appendix B).

In addition, 9 states impose time limits on subsidy eligibility for student parents in education or training, 17 require parents to participate in education or training for a set amount of time or credit hours per week or semester, and 6 require parents to demonstrate “satisfactory academic progress” in order to remain eligible (Appendix B). When parents are required to participate in an activity for a significant number of hours per week, those hours can become arduous for those who need to enroll part-time so they can effectively balance family care on top of school, and often work, in addition to dealing with substantial

financial need (Gault, Reichlin, and Román 2014). Strict participation rules for child care assistance can make it substantially more difficult for parents to manage multiple responsibilities and often unpredictable work schedules that complicate their pursuit of postsecondary education (Gault, Reichlin, and Román 2014; Gault and Reichlin 2014).

## Waiting Lists for Child Care Subsidies

Even when student parents meet the eligibility requirements to receive child care subsidies, long waiting lists can make them difficult to obtain; the length of the waiting periods vary greatly from state to state (Schulman and Blank 2015). Families may remain on a waiting list for months or years before receiving assistance.<sup>3</sup> In early 2015, 21 states had a waiting list or had frozen intake for state child care subsidies, up from 18 in 2014 (Schulman and Blank 2015).

## Conclusion

States can play a large role in improving access to child care for student parents. Variation in the availability of campus child care, the restrictiveness of subsidy rules for parents in education and training programs, and the length of child care subsidy waiting lists, means some states support student parent success than others. Relaxing eligibility requirements for child care subsidies, including the elimination of burdensome work requirements, would allow student parents more flexibility to pursue postsecondary education credentials in a way that fits with their busy schedules and accounts for their multiple responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> Greater federal, state, and institutional investment in campus child care is also needed so that campuses can become better equipped to support growing numbers of college students with children. As the country strives to increase rates of degree attainment among students from diverse backgrounds, making quality child care more accessible represents a critical step toward improving college completion among the 4.8 million undergraduate students who are also parents.

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<sup>3</sup> In most states with waiting lists, parents who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or are transitioning from TANF can receive subsidies without being put on a waiting list (Schulman and Blank 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Some states, such as Arkansas, California, Kansas, Nevada, and North Dakota, did make subsidy eligibility rules less restrictive for parents in job training and education programs in their 2016-18 state CCDF plans (in comparison to their 2014-15 state CCDF plans). A number of states, including Illinois, Utah and Wyoming, had more restrictive eligibility rules in their 2016-18 plans than in their 2014-15 plans (Institute for Women's Policy Research 2016e; National Women's Law Center 2015).

## Appendix A. Share of Public Two- and Four-Year Institutions with Campus Child Care in 2015 by State

State	Public 2-Year Institutions		Public 4-Year Institutions		All Public 2- & 4-Year Institutions		Rank
	Total #	% with Campus Care	Total #	% with Campus Care	Total #	% with Campus Care	
Alaska	1	0%	3	33%	4	25%	43
Alabama	25	12%	14	36%	39	21%	46
Arkansas	22	18%	11	27%	33	21%	46
Arizona	20	30%	10	20%	30	27%	41
California	116	81%	34	91%	150	83%	2
Colorado	14	29%	14	71%	28	50%	22
Connecticut	12	75%	9	33%	21	57%	15
District of Columbia	0	0%	2	50%	2	50%	22
Delaware	1	100%	2	0%	3	33%	38
Florida	4	25%	38	55%	42	52%	21
Georgia	24	25%	29	17%	53	21%	46
Hawaii	6	83%	4	50%	10	70%	9
Iowa	16	44%	3	100%	19	53%	17
Idaho	4	50%	4	100%	8	75%	5
Illinois	48	75%	12	83%	60	77%	4
Indiana	1	0%	15	67%	16	63%	11
Kansas	25	28%	8	75%	33	39%	32
Kentucky	16	31%	8	50%	24	38%	34
Louisiana	16	13%	17	24%	33	18%	50
Massachusetts	16	63%	14	43%	30	53%	17
Maryland	16	81%	13	46%	29	66%	10
Maine	7	43%	8	38%	15	40%	31
Michigan	27	22%	19	79%	46	46%	26
Minnesota	31	35%	12	67%	43	44%	28
Missouri	14	43%	13	46%	27	44%	28
Mississippi	15	40%	8	50%	23	43%	30
Montana	11	45%	6	67%	17	53%	17
North Carolina	59	24%	16	38%	75	27%	41
North Dakota	5	60%	9	44%	14	50%	22
Nebraska	8	38%	7	86%	15	60%	13
New Hampshire	7	43%	6	33%	13	38%	34
New Jersey	19	42%	13	62%	32	50%	22
New Mexico	19	42%	9	56%	28	46%	26
Nevada	1	100%	6	67%	7	71%	8
New York	36	83%	43	77%	79	80%	3
Ohio	25	60%	35	49%	60	53%	17
Oklahoma	13	23%	17	35%	30	30%	40
Oregon	17	47%	9	67%	26	54%	16
Pennsylvania	17	47%	45	31%	62	35%	37
Rhode Island	1	100%	2	100%	3	100%	1
South Carolina	20	15%	13	31%	33	21%	46
South Dakota	5	40%	7	29%	12	33%	38
Tennessee	13	15%	10	70%	23	39%	32
Texas	60	35%	45	42%	105	38%	34
Utah	1	100%	7	71%	8	75%	5
Virginia	24	17%	16	31%	40	23%	44
Vermont	1	0%	5	20%	6	17%	51
Washington	17	88%	26	65%	43	74%	7
Wisconsin	17	35%	14	86%	31	58%	14
West Virginia	9	0%	13	38%	22	23%	44
Wyoming	7	57%	1	100%	8	63%	11

Note: Community College defined as degree-granting public affiliation postsecondary institutions offering associate's degrees. Four-year public institutions defined as degree-granting public affiliation postsecondary institutions offering bachelor's degrees and above. Institutions in outlying areas/territories excluded.

Source: IWPR analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems (IPEDS). 2015 Institutional Characteristics Component (2015 Preliminary Release).

## Appendix B. State Child Care Subsidy Eligibility Rules for Parents in Education and Training

	Activity Requirement		Degree Program Limited to Vocational Education or Less Than a Bachelor's Degree	Time Limit on Education	Satisfactory Academic Progress Requirement
	Work (hours per week)	Education/Training (hours per week or enrollment intensity)			
Alabama		15 hours or full-time			
Alaska					
Arizona	20 hours <sup>1</sup>				✓
Arkansas		part-time <sup>2</sup>			
California			✓		
Colorado				four years <sup>3</sup>	
Connecticut					
Delaware*			✓ <sup>4</sup>		
District of Columbia		20 hours <sup>5</sup>			
Florida*		20 hours <sup>6</sup>			
Georgia		24 hours <sup>7</sup>	✓	12 months <sup>8</sup>	
Hawaii					
Idaho				40 months <sup>9</sup>	
Illinois	hours not specified <sup>10</sup>				
Indiana					
Iowa				24 months <sup>11</sup>	
Kansas	15 hours				
Kentucky	20 hours <sup>12</sup>				
Louisiana		30 hours <sup>13</sup>			
Maine		half-time or 6 credits per semester			
Maryland					
Massachusetts					
Michigan					
Minnesota*					✓
Mississippi		full-time			
Missouri					
Montana	10 hours <sup>14</sup>				✓
Nebraska					
Nevada		6 credit hours per semester <sup>15</sup>			
New Hampshire*			✓	two years <sup>16</sup>	
New Jersey		20 hours or 12 credit hours per semester <sup>17</sup>			
New Mexico					
New York	17.5 hours <sup>18</sup>				
North Carolina			✓		
North Dakota					
Ohio				144 undergraduate semester hours <sup>19</sup>	
Oklahoma*					
Oregon	hours not specified <sup>20</sup>				
Pennsylvania*	10 hours	10 hours			
Rhode Island*		20 hours	✓	less than one year <sup>21</sup>	
South Carolina		15 hours			
South Dakota*		20 hours or 15 credit hours per semester <sup>22</sup>			
Tennessee*		30 hours <sup>23</sup>			
Texas		25 hours <sup>24</sup>			✓
Utah*	15 hours <sup>25</sup>			24 months <sup>26</sup>	
Vermont					
Virginia			✓ <sup>27</sup>		✓
Washington*	20 hours <sup>28</sup>		✓		
West Virginia		part-time			✓ <sup>29</sup>
Wisconsin*	5 hours <sup>30</sup>		✓	24 months	
Wyoming					
<b>Total with Limits</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

\*Eligibility rules apply only to parents who do not receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

Source: IWPR analysis of Approved CCDF Plans (FY 2016-2018) (available at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/occ/resource/state-plans>).

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> (AZ) Teen parents attending a high school or remedial education program do not have to meet this requirement.
- <sup>2</sup> (AR) Parents attending college, university, a technical institute, or a training program must be enrolled a minimum of part-time; job training participants do not have to meet this requirement.
- <sup>3</sup> (CO) Child care assistance is available for 12 months for high school/high school equivalency programs, ESL courses, and adult basic education courses. Parents are eligible for job training and education programs for a minimum of two years and a maximum of four years.
- <sup>4</sup> (DE) Parents are eligible to receive subsidies if they are attending high school or enrolled in a GED program or job training, apprenticeship, or vocational skills programs that are expected to lead to a job within a foreseeable timeframe.
- <sup>5</sup> (DC) Parents must participate in a minimum of 20 hours of an approved activity, which can include a job, a documented training program, an educational activity that leads to a GED or high school diploma, or other approved training programs with additional work requirements. They must have a source of income to remain eligible in order to be eligible, though income does not have to come from a job.
- <sup>6</sup> (FL) Single parents must participate in 20 hours of education and/or work per week. Two-parent families must participate in 40 hours of education and/or work per week.
- <sup>7</sup> (GA) Parents must be enrolled in training programs full-time or part-time in combination with another activity for 24 hours per week. Parents in Georgia who are under the age of 20 must be enrolled full-time in a middle school, high school or GED program. Parents 21 or older must participate in a GED program in combination with another approved activity for at least 24 hours per week.
- <sup>8</sup> (GA) Job training programs are an acceptable activity for 12 months. After 12 months parents can continue training in combination with an approved activity for at least 24 hours per week. Parents 21 or older may attend only a GED program for 12 months.
- <sup>9</sup> (ID) Parents who have received subsidies for more than 40 months of postsecondary education are not eligible for additional subsidies for education programs.
- <sup>10</sup> (IL) Parents who were active cases prior to July 1, 2015, are considered eligible for child care subsidies if participating in education or training programs. New cases are not eligible based on participation in education and training alone and have additional minimum work requirements. There are no minimum hours for eligibility, but approved days must be reasonably related to the activity schedule.
- <sup>11</sup> (IA) Parents have a 24 month lifetime eligibility to receive child care assistance to attend postsecondary education or vocational training. Time spent in high school, GED, or ESL courses does not count towards this limit.
- <sup>12</sup> (KY) Single parents are required to work 20 hours per week and two-parent families must work 40 hours per week.
- <sup>13</sup> (LA) If parents are not at a job training site or in a classroom for a minimum average of 30 hours per week, they must supplement their activities with work.
- <sup>14</sup> (MT) Single parents attending school part-time are required to work 40 hours per month. Two-parent families where one parent is attending full-time and the other part-time are expected to work 60 hours per month.
- <sup>15</sup> (NV) Parents in education programs must be enrolled in a minimum of six or more credit semester hours to receive assistance, this does not apply for parents in job training programs.
- <sup>16</sup> (NH) Non-TANF recipients have a two-year lifetime limit for using child care assistance for educational pursuits.
- <sup>17</sup> (NJ) Parents must enroll in at least nine credit hours during the summer term. If a parent is attending a job training or education program at a less frequent rate, they must combine work, school, and/or training to equal a full-time activity.
- <sup>18</sup> (NY) Parents enrolled in a two- or four-year degree program must work a minimum of 17.5 hours per week.
- <sup>19</sup> (OH) Parents are no longer eligible to receive assistance if they have completed 144 undergraduate semester hours or 216 undergraduate quarter hours.
- <sup>20</sup> (OR) Parents must be working while attending education or training programs, but there are no minimum work requirements. The number of study/classroom hours for which parents can receive subsidies must be less than or equal to their hours spent working. Parents can receive a maximum of 215 hours of coverage per month.
- <sup>21</sup> (RI) Eligible parents that are not part of the RIWorks program may only attend a training program if it is less than one year in duration.
- <sup>22</sup> (SD) Parents who do not participate in job training or education programs for 20 hours a week or 15 credit hours per semester must combine work and school for a combined minimum of 80 hours per month.
- <sup>23</sup> (TN) Parents must be involved in 30 hours per week of activities. If an education or training program is not 30 hours per week, the parent must combine the program with paid work or another acceptable activity for 30 hours per week.
- <sup>24</sup> (TX) Single parents must participate in a minimum of 25 hours per week of activity, which can be a combination of school, training, and/or work. The requirement for two-parent families is 50 hours per week.
- <sup>25</sup> (UT) Single parents must work an average of 15 hours per week. In two-parent families, one parent must work 15 hours per week while the other works 30 hours per week.
- <sup>26</sup> (UT) With the exception of high school, GED or ESL courses, educational pursuits are capped at 24 months or the last two years of a bachelor's degree.

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<sup>27</sup> (VA) Job training and education programs are limited to those with a curriculum related to the fulfillment of an individual's employment goal.

<sup>28</sup> (WA) Parents must work 20 hours per week in an unsubsidized job or 16 hours per week in a state or federal work study job.

<sup>29</sup> (WV) Parents must show satisfactory progress by maintaining a minimum GPA of 2.0.

<sup>30</sup> (WI) Parents must work five hours per week, unless they are under the age of 20 and attending high school, GED or HSED programs.

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