



NC CHILD CARE GRANT UTILIZATION PLAYBOOK

Empowering Students. Supporting Families. Strengthening Communities.



SUPPORT STUDENT-PARENTS

Remove barriers to
education.



INVEST IN SUCCESS

Help students stay
enrolled and complete.



STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

Provide stability
when it matters most.



BUILD COMMUNITIES

A stronger student body
creates a stronger state.



CREATE A LASTING IMPACT

Today's support.
Tomorrow's leaders.



CHILD CARE GRANT UTILIZATION PLAYBOOK

Supporting Student-parents Through Strategic and Innovative Use of Child Care Grant Funds

Executive Summary

Across North Carolina's community colleges, thousands of students work each day to balance the responsibilities of parenthood while pursuing educational and career goals. For many of these students, access to reliable and affordable childcare is one of the most significant factors influencing whether they enroll, persist, and ultimately complete a credential.

Recognizing this challenge, the General Assembly has invested more than \$3 million annually in Child Care Grant funding to assist student-parents with childcare expenses. The intent of the program is straightforward: reduce childcare-related financial barriers so student-parents can remain enrolled and achieve their educational goals.

Despite this investment and the well-documented need among students, colleges have historically struggled to fully utilize available funding. Significant balances often remain unspent at the end of each fiscal year, even as colleges continue to report childcare as one of the most common barriers affecting student success.

This playbook was developed to help colleges rethink how they approach childcare assistance. While compliance remains essential, successful utilization requires more than simply processing reimbursements. It requires intentional outreach, innovative partnerships, proactive identification of student-parents, and a commitment to viewing childcare support as a student success strategy rather than solely a financial assistance program.

The purpose of this guide is to provide colleges with practical, compliant, and innovative approaches to maximizing Child Care Grant utilization while improving student outcomes. Throughout this document, institutions will find examples, promising practices, implementation strategies, and planning tools designed to help transform childcare funding into a powerful retention and completion initiative.

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Introduction

The Child Care Grant exists because student-parents face unique challenges that can significantly impact their ability to remain enrolled and succeed academically.

For many students, childcare expenses represent one of the largest non-tuition costs associated with attending college. When childcare becomes unavailable, unreliable, or unaffordable, students are often forced to miss classes, reduce course loads, delay enrollment, or withdraw entirely.

The Child Care Grant was created to address these challenges by providing financial support for childcare expenses incurred by eligible student-parents.

Under State Board guidance, the intent of the Child Care Grant is to assist student-parents with the financial responsibilities of childcare so they may remain enrolled and complete their educational goals.

Eligible childcare providers may include:

- Licensed daycare centers
- Licensed individual providers
- Unlicensed childcare providers
- Grandparents or other relatives (excluding the child's parent)
- Personal nannies
- Before-school programs
- After-school programs
- Summer childcare programs

While the program provides significant flexibility regarding provider types, colleges must ensure all expenditures remain reasonable, documented, and compliant with State Board requirements.

This playbook is designed to help institutions not only comply with program requirements but also maximize the impact of available funding.

CHAPTER 1

Reframing Childcare as a Student Success Strategy

Why This Matters

Historically, many institutions have viewed childcare funding as a reimbursement program administered primarily through financial aid or student services offices. While reimbursement remains an important component of program administration, this narrow perspective often limits both participation and utilization.

The reality is that childcare support affects nearly every aspect of student success.

When student-parents have reliable childcare, they are more likely to:

- Attend class regularly
- Maintain academic progress
- Persist from semester to semester
- Complete credentials
- Enter the workforce with improved earning potential

Conversely, when childcare challenges arise, students often face difficult decisions that can disrupt their educational journey.

For this reason, colleges should view childcare assistance not simply as financial aid, but as a strategic investment in student retention, completion, and workforce development.

Understanding the Utilization Challenge

Over the past several years, colleges have collectively left significant portions of their childcare allocations unspent.

This underutilization creates several concerns:

Student Impact

- Unspent funds mean that student-parents who could benefit from assistance may never receive support.

Institutional Impact

- Low utilization may suggest that colleges are not fully connecting available resources with demonstrated student need.

Funding Sustainability

- Future funding decisions may be influenced by historical spending patterns. Continued underutilization may make it difficult to justify additional investments despite ongoing demand.
-

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Maximizing the impact of the Child Care Grant requires more than simply administering a financial assistance program, it requires a coordinated institutional strategy focused on student success. Colleges that consistently achieve higher utilization rates recognize that childcare support is most effective when it is intentionally integrated into institutional planning, supported by executive leadership, and embraced as a shared responsibility across campus. The following strategies provide practical approaches for embedding childcare assistance into existing student success initiatives while fostering collaboration among campus stakeholders.

Position Childcare as a Retention Initiative

Include childcare support within:

- Student success plans
- Retention strategies
- Strategic enrollment management initiatives
- Basic needs programs

Engage Leadership

Ensure discussions regarding childcare support occur at multiple levels of the institution, including:

- President's Cabinet
- Student Services Leadership Teams
- Enrollment Management Committees
- Foundation Boards

Create Shared Ownership

Childcare support should not be viewed as the responsibility of one office. Supporting student-parents should not rest solely with one department or individual. The most successful colleges establish a collaborative, cross-functional approach in which multiple offices work together to identify student needs, communicate available resources, and connect students with appropriate support services. By creating shared ownership, institutions can provide a more seamless and comprehensive experience for student-parents.

Potential partners include:

- Financial Aid
 - Admissions
 - Advising
 - Student Success Centers
 - Workforce Development
 - Veterans Services
 - Institutional Foundations
-

Dispelling Common Myths About the Child Care Grant

As colleges implement the Child Care Grant program, misconceptions about eligibility and allowable uses of funds can unintentionally limit participation and reduce utilization. These misunderstandings often result in eligible student-parents not receiving assistance or institutions taking a more restrictive approach than intended by program guidance.

The following clarifications address several of the most common misconceptions reported by colleges and reinforce the flexibility available within the Child Care Grant program while maintaining compliance with State Board guidance.

Myth #1: The Child Care Grant can only assist one child per student-parent.

Fact: The Child Care Grant is intended to assist eligible student-parents with childcare expenses that support their ability to remain enrolled and successfully complete their educational goals. If a student-parent has multiple children requiring childcare services, colleges may provide assistance for eligible childcare expenses associated with more than one child, provided all expenses are reasonable, properly documented, and comply with program requirements.

Key Consideration

The focus should be on addressing the student's documented childcare needs—not limiting assistance based solely on the number of children receiving care.

Myth #2: Child Care Grant funds cannot be paid directly to the student-parent.

Fact: Child Care Grant funds may be disbursed directly to the student-parent **after** the college receives a valid invoice from an eligible childcare provider and appropriate documentation verifying the student's class attendance. Funds provided directly to the student-parent must be used solely for the purpose of paying the childcare provider for services rendered. If the student has already made the payment out-of-pocket to the provider (because the college requires services rendered, the student can be reimbursed for that payment).

Key Consideration

Whether funds are paid directly to the provider or to the student-parent, colleges must ensure all required documentation is obtained and retained in accordance with program guidance.

Myth #3: Online students and Continuing Education students are not eligible.

Fact: Eligible student-parents may include students enrolled in curriculum or Continuing Education programs, as well as students participating in online instruction. Colleges are encouraged to establish equitable eligibility criteria that reflect the diverse educational pathways of today's students.

Student-parent populations often include:

- Curriculum students
- Continuing Education students
- Full-time students
- Part-time students
- Online learners
- Hybrid students
- Military-affiliated students

Key Consideration

Childcare responsibilities exist regardless of instructional delivery method. Online learning does not eliminate the need for childcare while students attend virtual classes, complete coursework, participate in required labs, or engage in other academic activities.

Myth #4: Child Care Grant funds cannot be used during college-sanctioned academic breaks.

Fact: Childcare assistance may be provided during short college-sanctioned academic breaks, including winter break, spring break, and fall break, when the expense directly supports the student's continued enrollment or participation in college-related activities and otherwise complies with program requirements. If the student is enrolled during the fall term and does not intend to re-enroll in the spring term, the childcare support ends at the end of the end of the term. Also, summer is not covered if the student is not enrolled for that term.

Some childcare providers require continuous enrollment, and student-parents may lose their child's placement if they withdraw them during short college breaks, such as spring break. Furthermore, many student-parents continue to balance employment, internships, academic preparation, registration activities, or other educational responsibilities during these periods, while their children may no longer have access to school-based childcare.

Key Consideration

Colleges should evaluate these requests based on documented student need and program eligibility rather than assuming academic breaks automatically make childcare expenses ineligible.

Best Practice

When questions arise regarding program eligibility or allowable uses of funds, colleges should begin with the guiding purpose of the Child Care Grant:

The intent of the Child Care Grant is to assist student-parents with the financial responsibilities of childcare so they may remain enrolled and successfully complete their educational goals.

Applying this purpose consistently helps institutions make student-centered decisions while ensuring responsible stewardship of public funds.

Promising Practice

The Student-parent Success Framework

Rather than operating childcare assistance as a stand-alone funding program, several colleges have incorporated childcare support into broader student success initiatives. These colleges view childcare assistance as one component of a larger ecosystem of support that includes:

- Emergency assistance
- Transportation support
- Food security programs
- Academic advising
- Career services

As a result, childcare funding becomes part of a comprehensive strategy designed to help students persist and complete their educational goals.

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- How does our institution currently identify student-parents?
- Is childcare discussed as part of our student success strategy?
- Who owns childcare support on our campus?
- Are student-parents aware that assistance exists?
- What barriers prevent students from accessing available resources?
- What would full utilization of our childcare allocation look like?

Quick Wins

Colleges seeking immediate opportunities to improve utilization should consider:

- ✓ Including childcare questions on intake and enrollment documents
- ✓ Adding childcare information to orientation programs
- ✓ Conducting a student-parent awareness campaign each semester
- ✓ Creating a referral process for advisors and faculty
- ✓ Developing partnerships with local childcare providers
- ✓ Including childcare support information in financial aid communications

These relatively simple strategies can significantly increase awareness and improve utilization while strengthening support for student-parents.

CHAPTER 2

Identifying Student-parents and Understanding Their Needs

Understanding the Student-parent Experience

One of the greatest challenges colleges face in effectively utilizing Child Care Grant funds is identifying the students who could benefit from the program. While institutions often recognize childcare as a significant barrier to student success, many student-parents remain invisible within institutional systems.

Unlike other student populations that may be easily identified through admissions, financial aid, or program participation data, student-parents are often not systematically tracked. As a result, colleges frequently underestimate both the size of their student-parent population and the extent of childcare-related challenges affecting enrollment, persistence, and completion.

Many student-parents never request assistance. Some are unaware that support exists. Others assume they do not qualify. Many are simply focused on balancing work, family, and academic responsibilities and do not have the time or capacity to seek out additional resources.

The result is a missed opportunity, not only to support students, but also to fully utilize available Child Care Grant funding. To maximize the impact of the program, colleges must move from a passive approach that waits for students to self-identify, to a proactive approach that intentionally seeks to understand and support student-parent needs.

Why Identification Matters

The Child Care Grant cannot assist students who are unknown to the institution.

Successful utilization begins with understanding:

- Who your student-parents are
- What barriers they are experiencing
- When childcare challenges are most likely to occur
- How those challenges affect enrollment and persistence

When colleges develop systems to identify student-parents early, they create opportunities to intervene before childcare becomes a reason for stopping out, withdrawing, or reducing course loads.

Identification is not simply about spending available funds. It is about connecting students with resources that help them remain enrolled and complete their educational goals.

The Diverse Needs of Student-parents

Student-parents are not a single population.

A traditional-aged student with one child may face very different challenges than a working adult learner supporting multiple children while attending classes at night.

Likewise, an online student may experience different childcare needs than a student attending in-person classes.

Colleges should recognize that eligible student-parents may include:

- Full-time students
- Part-time students
- Online learners
- Continuing Education students
- Curriculum students
- Military-affiliated students
- Single parents
- Married parents
- Foster parents or legal guardians

Each group may require different outreach strategies and support mechanisms.

Understanding these differences allows colleges to create more effective communication and utilization strategies.

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Enrollment-Based Identification

The enrollment process presents one of the earliest opportunities to identify student-parents.

Colleges should consider adding questions to intake or orientation forms that help identify students with childcare responsibilities.

Examples include:

- Do you have dependent children?
- Will childcare responsibilities impact your ability to attend classes?
- Would you like information about childcare assistance programs?

These questions not only help identify students but also communicate that the institution recognizes and supports the needs of student-parents.

Orientation and Onboarding

Orientation programs provide a critical opportunity to connect students with available resources.

Childcare support information should be incorporated into:

- New student orientation
- Adult learner orientation
- Continuing Education orientation
- Military-affiliated student orientation
- Online student onboarding

Many colleges discover that simply mentioning childcare assistance during orientation significantly increases awareness and participation.

Financial Aid and Student Services Intake

Student-parents frequently interact with financial aid offices and student services staff.

These interactions provide opportunities to identify unmet childcare needs.

Potential questions include:

- Are childcare expenses creating financial challenges?
- Have childcare responsibilities affected your class attendance?
- Would additional childcare support help you remain enrolled?

Financial aid professionals and student success staff can serve as valuable referral partners in connecting students to available resources.

Advising and Academic Success Coaching

Academic advisors often develop strong relationships with students and are well-positioned to identify childcare-related barriers.

Colleges should consider providing advisors with:

- Information about the Child Care Grant
- Referral procedures
- Eligibility guidelines
- Awareness materials

When advisors understand available resources, they can help students access support before challenges become crises.

Leveraging Technology and Data

Modern student information systems and CRM platforms provide powerful opportunities for identifying student-parents.

Institutions should explore available data sources to identify students who may benefit from childcare assistance.

Potential indicators include:

FAFSA Information

- Students reporting dependent children may indicate potential childcare needs.

Pell Grant Recipients

- Many Pell recipients are balancing significant financial responsibilities, including childcare costs.

Adult Learners

- Adult learners are more likely to have dependent children and childcare responsibilities.

Workforce Continuing Education Students

- Many workforce students are balancing employment, family responsibilities, and education simultaneously.

Early Alert Systems

- Students reporting attendance challenges may be experiencing childcare-related barriers.
- Data-informed outreach allows colleges to identify students who may never proactively seek assistance.

Course Withdrawal Forms

- Students requesting a course withdrawal may cite a need for childcare as the reason they want to withdraw.
-

Promising Practice 1

Student-Parent Registry

Several colleges have successfully implemented voluntary Student-parent Registries.

These registries allow students to self-identify and receive targeted information regarding:

- Child Care Grant opportunities
- Community childcare resources
- Parenting support services
- Emergency assistance programs
- Student-parent events

In addition to improving communication, registries provide institutions with valuable data regarding student-parent populations and needs.

Promising Practice 2

Student-Parent Resource Centers

Some institutions have created formal or informal student-parent support programs that serve as centralized points of contact for childcare resources and referrals.

These programs often coordinate:

- Childcare assistance
- Community referrals
- Financial aid support
- Basic needs resources
- Parenting support services

By creating a dedicated support structure, colleges increase awareness and improve access to available resources.

Promising Practice 3

Student-Parent Resource Webpage

Many colleges have developed dedicated Student-Parent webpages that serve as a central hub for information, resources, and support services available both on campus and in the local community.

These webpages often include:

- Child Care Grant information
- Financial Aid and scholarship resources
- Campus support services
- Community childcare providers
- Basic needs resources
- Parenting and family support services
- Local community organizations
- Frequently asked questions and college contacts

By creating a centralized, easy-to-access resource, colleges increase awareness of available services, improve referrals, and make it easier for student-parents to find the support they need. A Student-Parent webpage is a low-cost, high-impact strategy that can benefit current students, prospective students, faculty, staff, and community partners alike.

Innovative Utilization Strategy

The Childcare Needs Assessment Campaign

Rather than waiting for students to seek assistance, colleges can conduct annual childcare needs assessments.

These assessments can be distributed through:

- Email campaigns
- CRM communications
- Student portals
- Text messaging
- Advising appointments

Sample questions may include:

- Are you currently responsible for childcare expenses?

- Have childcare costs impacted your educational goals?
- Would financial assistance for childcare improve your ability to remain enrolled?
- Are you currently receiving childcare assistance from another source?

The results can help colleges identify students, estimate demand, and develop utilization strategies before funds remain unspent.

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- How many student-parents currently attend our institution?
 - How confident are we in that estimate?
 - What systems exist to identify student-parents?
 - Are online and Continuing Education students included in our outreach efforts?
 - How are student-parents informed about available resources?
 - What barriers prevent students from accessing childcare assistance?
-

Quick Wins

Institutions seeking immediate opportunities to improve identification and utilization should consider:

- ✓ Including childcare information in orientation materials
 - ✓ Training advisors to identify childcare barriers
 - ✓ Launching a student-parent needs assessment survey
 - ✓ Creating a student-parent email distribution list
 - ✓ Developing targeted CRM campaigns
 - ✓ Collaborating with financial aid and student services offices to identify eligible students
 - ✓ Including online and Continuing Education students in outreach efforts
-

Looking Ahead

Identifying student-parents is only the first step.

Once colleges understand who their student-parents are and what challenges they face, the next question becomes:

How can institutions develop innovative and effective approaches to delivering childcare support?

The next chapter explores creative utilization models and practical strategies that colleges can implement to maximize Child Care Grant funding while improving student outcomes.

CHAPTER 3

Verifying Student Attendance

Supporting Compliance While Promoting Student Access

The Child Care Grant requires colleges to document student attendance before disbursing funds. While this requirement is straightforward in concept, colleges have frequently expressed questions regarding acceptable methods of verifying attendance, particularly for students enrolled in online, hybrid, and Continuing Education (CE) programs.

Because instructional delivery varies across institutions and programs, there is no single method that will be appropriate for every college. Instead, institutions should establish a consistent process that reasonably verifies a student's participation in educational activities while minimizing unnecessary administrative burden for both students and staff.

The objective is not to create additional barriers to accessing childcare assistance, but rather to ensure responsible stewardship of public funds while documenting that childcare support is directly connected to a student's educational participation.

General Principles

Attendance verification should:

- Be consistent with institutional attendance policies.
 - Be documented and retained in accordance with college record retention requirements.
 - Be reasonable, timely, and appropriate for the instructional delivery method.
 - Minimize unnecessary administrative burden on students and faculty.
 - Support equitable access for all eligible student populations.
-

Attendance Verification Strategies

Colleges may consider one or more of the following methods when verifying student attendance.

Traditional Classroom Attendance

For students enrolled in face-to-face instruction, attendance may be verified through:

- Faculty attendance rosters
- Student sign-in sheets

- Official attendance reports
 - Instructor certification of attendance
 - Student Information System (SIS) attendance records
-

Online Courses

Attendance in online learning environments may be demonstrated through evidence of active academic participation rather than physical presence.

Examples include:

- Assignment submissions
- Participation in discussion boards
- Completion of quizzes or assessments
- Instructor verification of active participation
- Submission of coursework
- Participation in required virtual class meetings

Colleges should rely on institutional definitions of academic attendance when determining acceptable documentation.

Hybrid Courses

For students enrolled in hybrid courses, colleges may combine multiple sources of documentation, including:

- Classroom attendance records
 - LMS participation
 - Assignment completion
 - Faculty verification
-

Continuing Education (CE) Programs

Attendance verification for Continuing Education students may vary depending upon the structure of the program.

Potential documentation may include:

- Instructor attendance records
- Class sign-in sheets

- Clock-hour attendance documentation
- Learning platform participation
- Instructor certification
- Workforce training attendance records
- Approved attendance reports maintained by the program

Institutions should ensure that attendance verification aligns with existing Continuing Education policies and documentation practices.

Alternative Verification Methods

In extenuating situations where traditional attendance documentation may not be readily available, colleges may consider additional forms of institutional documentation, such as:

- Academic advisor confirmation
 - Program coordinator verification
 - Registrar records
 - Official enrollment verification accompanied by documented academic participation
 - Student Success Coach verification, when supported by institutional records
-

Best Practices

Successful colleges often develop standardized attendance verification procedures that are communicated across departments responsible for administering the Child Care Grant.

Best practices include:

- Creating a standard attendance verification form.
 - Establishing consistent documentation procedures.
 - Utilizing existing institutional systems whenever possible.
 - Training faculty and staff on acceptable verification methods.
 - Reviewing procedures annually to ensure consistency and efficiency.
-

Promising Practice

Integrating Attendance Verification into Existing Processes

Rather than creating a separate attendance verification process exclusively for the Child Care Grant, several colleges have incorporated verification into existing institutional workflows.

For example, financial aid staff may obtain attendance confirmation directly through the Student Information System, while Continuing Education administrators may use existing clock-hour documentation already maintained for program compliance.

This approach reduces duplication of effort, minimizes administrative burden, and creates a more seamless experience for both students and staff.

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- Does our institution have a documented process for verifying attendance across all instructional formats?
 - Are online, hybrid, and Continuing Education students treated equitably in our verification procedures?
 - Are we relying on existing institutional records whenever possible?
 - Does our process balance compliance with student access?
-

Quick Wins

Colleges can strengthen attendance verification by:

- ✓ Developing a standardized attendance verification procedure.
 - ✓ Utilizing existing Student Information System and Learning Management System data.
 - ✓ Coordinating verification efforts across Financial Aid, Continuing Education, and Academic Affairs.
 - ✓ Training faculty and staff on acceptable documentation practices.
 - ✓ Reviewing procedures annually to ensure consistency and efficiency.
-

Leadership Insight

Attendance verification should serve as a mechanism for ensuring accountability—not as an unnecessary obstacle that delays or prevents eligible student-parents from receiving assistance.

The most effective institutions develop processes that are accurate, efficient, and student-centered while maintaining compliance with State Board requirements.

PART II

CHAPTER 4

Creative Utilization Models and Innovative Approaches

Rethinking Child Care Grant Utilization

One of the most common misconceptions surrounding the Child Care Grant is that its success is measured solely by how quickly funds are reimbursed. In reality, successful utilization begins much earlier. It begins with institutional planning, creative problem solving, and a willingness to remove barriers before they become obstacles to student success.

Across the state, colleges have consistently identified childcare as one of the greatest barriers affecting enrollment, persistence, and completion. Yet many institutions continue to end each fiscal year with unspent childcare allocations.

This disconnect suggests that the challenge is not a lack of student need, but rather the way colleges approach the delivery of childcare assistance.

Successful colleges recognize that student-parents rarely experience only one barrier. Childcare challenges often intersect with transportation, housing, food insecurity, work schedules, and financial hardship. Consequently, the Child Care Grant should be viewed as one component of a broader student support ecosystem.

The question shifts from:

"How do we reimburse childcare expenses?"

to

"How do we proactively remove childcare barriers before they interrupt a student's education?"

Addressing the Child Care Grant Reimbursement Model

The Child Care Grant is an allocation of state funds. State funds cannot be used to pay for services in advance. As a result, student parents using the grant are typically expected to:

- Locate an eligible childcare provider.
- Pay the provider upfront for services.

- Obtain and retain receipts or invoices.
- Submit the required documentation to the college.
- Wait for reimbursement after the payment is processed.

While this process may be manageable for some students, it presents a significant barrier for many student-parents who simply do not have the financial means to cover childcare costs in advance. As a result, students may delay or forgo childcare altogether, increasing the likelihood of missed classes, reduced academic engagement, or withdrawal from college.

Whenever possible, colleges should consider utilization strategies that reduce or eliminate the need for upfront payment while remaining compliant with program requirements. Post-service invoicing arrangements, partnerships with local childcare centers, and other innovative payment models can help remove financial barriers, provide students with immediate access to childcare, and ensure that grant funds are used in a manner that best supports student persistence and success.

Developing Community Childcare Partnerships

Recognizing that many community colleges do not have the financial resources, physical space, or operational capacity to establish and maintain an on-campus childcare center, colleges should explore strategic partnerships with existing childcare providers in their communities.

These partnerships can provide student-parents with timely access to childcare while allowing colleges to maximize the impact of Child Care Grant funding without creating new childcare infrastructure.

By working collaboratively with community providers, colleges can expand childcare access, reduce financial barriers, and simplify the payment process for student-parents.

Partnering with Drop-In Childcare Providers

Unexpected childcare disruptions are one of the leading reasons student-parents miss class, clinical assignments, advising appointments, tutoring sessions, or other required educational activities. Colleges should consider establishing relationships with local licensed drop-in childcare providers that can offer short-term childcare when unexpected needs arise.

Whenever possible, colleges should develop billing agreements that allow approved providers to invoice the college directly for expenses funded through the Child Care Grant after eligible childcare services have been rendered.

Establishing Direct Billing Partnerships with Childcare Providers

Many student-parents face significant financial barriers because childcare providers require payment before services are rendered. Even when reimbursement is available through the Child Care Grant, some students simply cannot afford the upfront cost.

To reduce this barrier, colleges are encouraged to develop partnerships with licensed childcare providers that are willing to accept direct payment from the college after childcare services have been provided.

Under this approach:

- Invoicing allows payment after childcare services are rendered.
- The student arranges childcare with an approved provider.
- The provider submits an invoice directly to the college.
- The college verifies eligibility and approves payment using Child Care Grant funds.
- Payment is issued directly to the childcare provider.

This process minimizes financial hardship for student-parents while ensuring providers receive timely payment for services rendered.

Promising Practice: Provider Partnership Network

Colleges may wish to establish a network of trusted childcare providers that are familiar with the Child Care Grant Program and willing to participate in post-service direct billing arrangements.

A provider partnership network can:

- Increase the number of childcare options available to student-parents.
 - Reduce administrative challenges for students and providers.
 - Improve consistency in payment procedures.
 - Strengthen relationships between colleges and community organizations.
 - Expand access to both short-term and long-term childcare solutions.
-

Planning Considerations

Before implementing post-service direct billing arrangements, colleges should develop internal procedures that address:

- Provider eligibility requirements.
- Invoice submission timelines.
- Documentation needed to support payment.

- Verification that childcare services were provided.
- Payment approval and processing procedures.
- Communication with providers regarding billing expectations.

Establishing clear procedures helps ensure consistent administration of grant funds while reducing delays for both providers and student-parents.

Best Practice

Rather than viewing childcare providers solely as vendors, colleges should cultivate them as **community partners**. Strong partnerships with licensed childcare providers, drop-in care centers, and family support organizations can significantly improve access to childcare while creating a more seamless experience for student-parents. These relationships also enable colleges to respond more quickly to urgent childcare needs and reduce the likelihood that students will miss classes or discontinue their education due to temporary childcare disruptions.

I would also consider adding a "**Promising Practices from the Field**" callout box throughout Chapter 5. These shaded boxes could highlight practical, scalable ideas—such as direct billing partnerships, drop-in childcare agreements, foundation-supported bridge funding, or referral partnerships with local agencies. That would make the guide feel less like a policy manual and more like an implementation resource that colleges can readily adapt to their own communities.

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Semester Childcare Campaigns

Instead of advertising childcare assistance only when students inquire, colleges should schedule structured outreach campaigns throughout the academic year.

Recommended campaign periods include:

- Summer Registration
- Fall Semester Opening
- Mid-Fall Check-In
- Spring Registration
- Mid-Spring Persistence Campaign
- End-of-Year Receipt Campaign

Each campaign should include emails, text messages, social media, CRM messaging, and advisor referrals.

Student-parent Success Grants

Rather than viewing childcare assistance as simply an expense reimbursement, colleges can position the Child Care Grant as a Student-parent Success Initiative.

Students receiving assistance should also receive referrals to:

- Academic advising
- Career coaching
- Emergency assistance
- Financial literacy
- Food assistance
- Mental health resources

The objective is to surround student-parents with holistic support.

Childcare Reimbursement Drives

Several times each semester, colleges should conduct targeted reimbursement campaigns encouraging students to submit eligible childcare invoices.

Examples include:

"Have You Paid for Childcare This Semester?"

or

"You May Qualify for Child Care Grant Assistance."

These campaigns can significantly increase participation before the fiscal year ends.

Promising Practice

Childcare Success Initiative

One college integrated childcare assistance into its student success framework rather than operating it solely through financial aid.

Academic advisors, success coaches, and financial aid staff jointly identified student-parents throughout the semester and referred them for childcare assistance.

The result was:

- Increased awareness
 - Improved utilization
 - Earlier interventions
 - Higher student satisfaction
-

Quick Wins

Colleges can immediately improve utilization by:

- ✓ Conducting semester reimbursement campaigns
 - ✓ Creating Student-parent Success initiatives
 - ✓ Including childcare discussions in advising appointments
 - ✓ Reviewing utilization monthly instead of annually
 - ✓ Identifying graduating student-parents
-

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- Do students know childcare assistance exists?
- Are we waiting for students to find us?
- What barriers prevent students from accessing funds?
- How could our institution simplify the process?

CHAPTER 5

Building Sustainable Childcare Support Beyond the Grant

The Child Care Grant is intended to help student-parents overcome immediate childcare barriers that could otherwise prevent them from enrolling, persisting, or completing their educational goals. While the grant provides critical short-term assistance, colleges should recognize that grant funding is limited and cannot serve as a permanent childcare solution for every student-parent.

Whenever possible, colleges should use the grant as a bridge to connect students with long-term childcare resources that can continue supporting them throughout their educational journey and beyond. By helping students establish sustainable childcare arrangements early in their enrollment, colleges can improve student persistence while ensuring grant resources remain available to assist new student-parents facing immediate childcare needs.

This approach allows colleges to address both the student's current challenge and their long-term success by transitioning them from temporary assistance to stable community-based childcare resources.

Transitioning Students to Sustainable Childcare Support

Colleges are encouraged to communicate clearly with student-parents that the Child Care Grant is designed to provide temporary financial assistance while they pursue more permanent childcare support options.

Early conversations with student-parents should emphasize that the grant serves as a bridge—not a long-term entitlement—and that college staff will assist them in identifying additional resources that may provide ongoing childcare assistance.

This proactive approach helps students:

- Address immediate childcare needs so they can begin or continue their education.
- Apply for long-term childcare assistance as early as possible.
- Reduce future disruptions caused by the expiration of grant funding.
- Establish reliable childcare arrangements that support educational persistence and completion.

At the same time, transitioning students to sustainable resources helps colleges maximize the impact of limited grant funds by making assistance available to additional student-parents who experience unexpected childcare barriers.

Recommended Institutional Practice

Rather than waiting until grant funds are exhausted, colleges should incorporate long-term childcare planning into the initial intake process.

During the first conversation with a student-parent, staff should:

1. Assess the student's immediate childcare needs.
2. Determine eligibility for the Child Care Grant.
3. Introduce available community childcare resources.
4. Encourage applications for long-term childcare assistance.
5. Follow up periodically to monitor progress toward securing sustainable childcare.

Integrating these conversations into the enrollment process helps create a seamless transition from temporary grant assistance to long-term childcare stability.

PART III

CHAPTER 6

Building Childcare Provider and Community Partnerships

Supporting Student-Parents Is a Community Responsibility

No single department—and certainly no single institution—can solve the childcare challenges facing today's student-parents. While colleges play an essential role in connecting students with financial resources, the most successful institutions recognize that meaningful childcare support requires collaboration far beyond the campus.

Communities are often rich with organizations that share a common mission of strengthening families, supporting workforce participation, and improving educational outcomes. Childcare providers, Smart Start partnerships, county departments of social services, workforce development boards, nonprofit organizations, faith-based organizations, and institutional foundations all have a vested interest in helping families succeed.

The Child Care Grant provides colleges with an opportunity to become conveners of these partnerships. Rather than serving solely as administrators of a funding program, colleges can become leaders in creating a coordinated network of support for student-parents.

When community organizations understand the availability and purpose of Child Care Grant funding, they become valuable partners in identifying students, removing barriers, and increasing utilization.

Ultimately, the objective is not simply to spend available funds—it is to create an environment in which student-parents can confidently pursue their education knowing that a network of support exists to help them succeed.

The Value of Strategic Partnerships

Developing Community Partnerships

Strong community partnerships are essential to creating long-term childcare solutions for student-parents. Colleges should actively develop relationships with local agencies and organizations that provide childcare assistance, referrals, and family support services.

Potential partners include:

- Smart Start Partnerships
- County Departments of Social Services (DSS)
- Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) agencies
- Local Early Childhood Education Programs
- Head Start and Early Head Start
- County and Municipal Family Support Programs
- Community Foundations
- Faith-Based Organizations
- United Way and other nonprofit organizations
- Licensed childcare providers participating in subsidy programs

Whenever possible, colleges should establish referral processes so students can be connected with these resources immediately after applying for the Child Care Grant.

Leveraging Institutional Foundations as Strategic Partners: A New Role for College Foundations

Institutional foundations have long served as champions of student success by funding scholarships, emergency grants, and innovative initiatives. Yet one of the greatest opportunities for foundation involvement may lie in supporting student-parents.

Many student-parents face a simple but significant obstacle: childcare providers require payment before services are provided, while reimbursement programs generally require documentation after services have been rendered.

For a student living paycheck to paycheck, this timing gap may prevent them from accessing childcare altogether.

Institutional foundations are uniquely positioned to bridge this gap.

The Foundation Bridge Funding Model

Imagine a student who has secured childcare but cannot afford the initial payment.

Instead of waiting until reimbursement becomes available, the institution's foundation provides temporary assistance.

Once childcare services are delivered and documentation is received, Child Care Grant funds reimburse the eligible expense.

The foundation's resources are restored and become available for the next student. This approach transforms the foundation into a catalyst for student persistence.

Strategic Opportunities

- **Foundation Bridge Fund**
 - Provide temporary assistance for initial childcare costs.
 - **Student-parent Emergency Fund**
 - Develop a revolving emergency fund specifically for childcare disruptions.
 - **Community Giving Campaign**
 - Invite local businesses and donors to support student-parent initiatives.
 - **Employer Partnerships**
 - Many local employers depend on community college graduates.
 - Employers may be willing to contribute toward childcare initiatives that support workforce development.
 - **Implementation Checklist**
 - Meet with Foundation Director
 - Develop reimbursement workflow
 - Establish documentation requirements
 - Create eligibility criteria
 - Develop communication materials
-

Recommended Institutional Practice

Rather than waiting until grant funds are exhausted, colleges should incorporate long-term childcare planning into the initial intake process.

During the first conversation with a student-parent, staff should:

6. Assess the student's immediate childcare needs.
7. Determine eligibility for the Child Care Grant.
8. Introduce available community childcare resources.
9. Encourage applications for long-term childcare assistance.
10. Follow up periodically to monitor progress toward securing sustainable childcare.

Integrating these conversations into the enrollment process helps create a seamless transition from temporary grant assistance to long-term childcare stability.

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Develop a Preferred Childcare Provider Network

One of the simplest and most effective strategies colleges can implement is the development of a preferred childcare provider network.

Rather than expecting students to locate childcare independently, colleges can identify providers within their service area that understand the Child Care Grant program and are willing to partner with the institution.

Potential partners may include:

- Licensed childcare centers
- Licensed family childcare homes
- Before-school and after-school programs
- Summer childcare programs
- YMCA childcare programs
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Parks and Recreation programs
- Community-based childcare organizations
- Faith-based childcare providers
- Qualified individual childcare providers

A preferred provider network does not limit student choice. Instead, it creates a trusted list of providers familiar with institutional processes and documentation requirements.

Benefits

- Faster invoice processing
- Improved communication
- Reduced documentation errors
- Increased student confidence
- Stronger relationships with local providers

Establish Community Resource Partnerships

Many organizations already provide services that complement childcare assistance.

Colleges should consider establishing formal relationships with organizations such as:

- County Departments of Social Services
- Smart Start Partnerships

- Local Partnership for Children
- Workforce Development Boards
- Head Start Programs
- Early Childhood Education Coalitions
- United Way
- Family Resource Centers
- Community Action Agencies

These organizations may assist with:

- Referrals
- Resource navigation
- Funding coordination
- Family support services
- Parent education
- Transportation assistance

Working together helps ensure that student-parents receive comprehensive support rather than fragmented services.

Partner with Local School Districts

Public school systems frequently operate:

- Before-school programs
- After-school programs
- Summer enrichment programs

These programs may provide affordable childcare options for school-aged children.

Colleges should explore opportunities to share information about the Child Care Grant with school district family engagement staff and after-school program coordinators.

Collaborate with Institutional Foundations

Institutional foundations can provide support beyond financial assistance.

Potential foundation roles include:

- Bridge funding for initial childcare expenses
- Emergency childcare assistance
- Community fundraising

- Donor engagement
- Student-parent scholarship initiatives
- Community awareness campaigns

Foundations often have relationships with local businesses and donors that can expand childcare support beyond State funding.

Promising Practice

Community Childcare Consortium

Several institutions have successfully convened local childcare providers, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies into a Childcare Consortium.

The consortium meets periodically to:

- Share information
- Identify community needs
- Coordinate services
- Improve referral processes
- Reduce duplication of resources

By bringing partners together around a common goal, colleges become leaders in addressing one of the most significant barriers to student success.

Innovative Utilization Strategy

Childcare Provider Information Sessions

Many childcare providers have little knowledge of financial assistance programs available to student-parents.

Colleges can host annual information sessions for providers to explain:

- The purpose of the Child Care Grant
- Student eligibility
- Documentation requirements
- Invoice procedures
- Payment timelines
- Contact information

Providers who understand the program become advocates for student-parents and valuable referral partners.

Develop a Student-Parent Resource Directory

Consider creating a comprehensive directory of local resources that includes:

Childcare Providers

- Licensed centers
- Family childcare homes
- Summer programs
- After-school programs

Financial Resources

- Child Care Grant
- DSS childcare subsidies
- Foundation assistance
- Emergency grants

Family Support Services

- Parenting classes
- Mental health resources
- Food assistance
- Transportation assistance
- Housing support

Providing students with one centralized resource reduces confusion and encourages utilization.

Implementation Checklist

Institutional Partnerships

- ☐ Identify community childcare providers.
 - ☐ Meet with local DSS representatives.
 - ☐ Connect with Smart Start and Partnership for Children organizations.
 - ☐ Develop a preferred provider directory.
 - ☐ Engage the college foundation.
-

Communication

- ☐ Host annual provider information sessions.
 - ☐ Create resource guides for student-parents.
 - ☐ Share Child Care Grant information with community partners.
 - ☐ Include providers in student resource fairs.
-

Sustainability

- ☐ Establish quarterly partnership meetings.
 - ☐ Review provider participation annually.
 - ☐ Collect feedback from students and providers.
 - ☐ Identify opportunities to expand partnerships.
-

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- Who are our current childcare partners?
 - What organizations in our community already support families?
 - Could stronger partnerships reduce barriers for student-parents?
 - How often do we communicate with childcare providers?
 - Are community organizations aware that Child Care Grant funding exists?
 - How can our institution become the community leader in supporting student-parents?
-

Quick Wins

Colleges looking to strengthen partnerships immediately should consider:

- ✓ Developing a preferred childcare provider list.
 - ✓ Meeting with county social services leadership.
 - ✓ Hosting a Child Care Grant provider workshop.
 - ✓ Creating a Student-parent Resource Directory.
 - ✓ Inviting childcare providers to campus resource fairs.
 - ✓ Including community organizations in orientation events.
 - ✓ Establishing quarterly partnership meetings.
-

Leadership Spotlight

Partnerships Multiply Impact

One of the most valuable lessons learned from successful colleges is that childcare support does not begin or end within the walls of the institution. Every new partnership creates another

pathway for connecting student-parents with the resources they need to remain enrolled and succeed.

By embracing collaboration, colleges move beyond administering a grant program and become community leaders committed to strengthening families, improving educational attainment, and advancing workforce development.

CHAPTER 7

Outreach, Marketing, and Awareness Strategies

If Students Don't Know About the Program, They Cannot Benefit From It

One of the simplest explanations for low Child Care Grant utilization is also one of the easiest to address: many eligible student-parents simply do not know that assistance is available.

Across North Carolina's community colleges, student-parents often discover childcare assistance only after they have experienced financial hardship, missed classes, reduced their course load, or considered withdrawing from college altogether. By that point, the opportunity to prevent the barrier has often passed.

The Child Care Grant should never become the "best kept secret" on campus.

Instead, colleges should adopt the philosophy that every student-parent should hear about childcare assistance multiple times, through multiple channels, and from multiple campus partners. Awareness should not depend on a student asking the right question or finding the right office. It should be intentionally woven throughout the student experience—from recruitment through graduation.

The most successful colleges recognize that outreach is not a one-time event. It is an ongoing strategy that normalizes asking for help and reinforces the institution's commitment to supporting student-parents.

Creating a Culture of Awareness

Marketing the Child Care Grant is not simply about increasing participation—it is about creating a campus culture where student-parents know they are seen, valued, and supported.

Every interaction with a prospective or current student presents an opportunity to communicate that support is available.

Rather than limiting information to financial aid webpages or printed brochures, colleges should integrate Child Care Grant messaging into the broader student experience.

Students should encounter information about childcare support during:

- Recruitment events
- Admissions communications
- New student orientation
- Financial aid counseling
- Academic advising
- Student success coaching
- Registration periods
- Early alert interventions
- Graduation planning

The goal is to make childcare assistance a familiar and visible resource throughout a student's educational journey.

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Develop a Year-Round Communication Plan

Instead of relying on a single announcement, colleges should establish a communication calendar that aligns with the academic year.

Recommended Communication Cycle

Summer (Recruitment and Registration)

Focus:

- New student awareness
- Registration support
- Parent outreach

Suggested message:

"Starting college this fall? Childcare assistance may be available to help you stay focused on your education."

Beginning of Each Semester

Focus:

- Awareness
- Eligibility

- Available resources

Suggested message:

"Balancing school and parenting? We may be able to help with childcare expenses."

Mid-Semester

Focus:

- Persistence
- Student retention

Suggested message:

"Already paying for childcare this semester? You may qualify for reimbursement of eligible expenses."

End of Semester

Focus:

- Planning for next term
- Continuing enrollment

Suggested message:

"Continue your education with confidence. Childcare assistance may be available for the upcoming semester."

Use Multiple Communication Channels

No single communication method reaches every student.

Colleges should develop an integrated communication strategy that includes:

Digital Communication

- Email campaigns
- CRM workflows

- Text messaging
 - Student portal announcements
 - College mobile applications
-

Social Media

Examples include:

- Student success stories
 - Frequently asked questions
 - Short informational videos
 - Student-parent spotlights
 - Awareness campaigns
-

Printed Materials

Examples include:

- Campus flyers
 - Table tents
 - Posters
 - Orientation packets
 - Child Care Grant brochures
-

In-Person Communication

Staff should be equipped to discuss childcare assistance during:

- Advising appointments
- Financial aid meetings
- Career coaching
- Student success coaching
- Admissions appointments

Students are more likely to respond when information comes through trusted relationships.

Strategic Marketing Campaigns

Rather than marketing only the funding itself, colleges should market the outcomes.

Examples include:

Campaign Theme

Stay Enrolled. We've Got Your Back.

Campaign Theme

You Focus on Class. We'll Help With Childcare.

Campaign Theme

Because Student-parents Deserve Support Too.

Campaign Theme

Invest in Your Future: We'll Help With Today.

Messages should focus on student success rather than program rules.

Leverage CRM Technology

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms provide one of the greatest opportunities to increase awareness.

Potential CRM campaigns include:

New Parent Campaign

Automatically send information to students who identify as parents.

FAFSA Parent Campaign

Target students reporting dependent children.

Online Student Campaign

Many online students mistakenly assume they are not eligible.

Dedicated messaging should remind them that online students may qualify.

Receipt Reminder Campaign

Near mid-semester, send reminders encouraging students to submit eligible childcare invoices.

Promising Practice

Child Care Awareness Week

Several colleges have successfully implemented annual awareness campaigns dedicated entirely to student-parents.

Activities may include:

- Information tables
- Community childcare providers
- Financial aid workshops
- Student-parent networking events
- Family resource fairs

Such events increase awareness while reinforcing that student-parents are an important part of the campus community.

Innovative Outreach Strategies

Many student-parents balance work, school, and family responsibilities while navigating multiple community support systems. As a result, they may have limited opportunities to engage with campus offices or learn about available resources through traditional college communication channels.

To increase awareness and improve access to the Child Care Grant Program, colleges should consider expanding outreach efforts beyond the campus and into the communities they serve. Building relationships with organizations that regularly interact with families can help colleges identify and connect with student-parents who may benefit from childcare assistance before childcare challenges become barriers to enrollment or persistence.

Community-based outreach also reinforces the message that the college is committed to supporting the whole student—not just the academic experience.

Potential Community Partners

Colleges should consider developing partnerships with organizations that frequently serve families with young children, including:

- **Pediatric and Family Medical Practices** – Display informational materials in waiting rooms and provide healthcare staff with referral information for student-parents seeking educational opportunities.
- **Public Libraries** – Partner with libraries to distribute program information, participate in family literacy events, and engage parents attending children's programming.
- **Community and Recreation Centers** – Share information during family-oriented events, parenting workshops, and community resource fairs.
- **Local Workforce Development Boards and NCWorks Career Centers** – Coordinate outreach to working adults who may be interested in enrolling in college but face childcare barriers.
- **Head Start and Early Head Start Programs** – Provide information to families who may already be utilizing early childhood education services and are pursuing educational advancement.
- **Faith-Based Organizations** – Collaborate with churches, ministries, and community outreach programs that support families through educational and social service initiatives.
- **YMCA and Parks & Recreation Programs** – Participate in community events and provide information to families utilizing youth programs and childcare services.
- **Boys & Girls Clubs and Youth Development Organizations** – Connect with parents during family engagement activities and community events.
- **Local Employers** – Partner with employers, particularly those with large numbers of working parents, to share information with employees who may benefit from childcare assistance while pursuing education.
- **Departments of Social Services (DSS)** – Coordinate referrals for families receiving public assistance who may also be interested in educational opportunities.

- **Smart Start Partnerships and Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) Agencies**
– Work collaboratively to connect families with both childcare assistance and postsecondary education opportunities.

Outreach Strategies That Build Awareness

Community partnerships become most effective when colleges move beyond simply providing brochures and instead develop ongoing relationships with partner organizations. Colleges should consider:

- Participating in community resource fairs and family-focused events.
- Providing outreach materials that community partners can display or distribute.
- Offering brief presentations or informational sessions for partner organizations.
- Establishing referral processes so community partners know how to connect student-parents directly with the college.
- Hosting joint events with community organizations focused on education, family support, and student success.
- Providing digital resources, QR codes, and social media content that partners can easily share with families.

Meeting Student-Parents Where They Are

Many student-parents interact with healthcare providers, childcare programs, workforce agencies, libraries, and community organizations far more frequently than they visit admissions, financial aid, or student services offices. By extending outreach into these trusted community spaces, colleges can reach prospective and current student-parents earlier, reduce awareness gaps, and connect families with available childcare assistance before financial barriers jeopardize their educational goals.

Expanding outreach beyond campus not only increases participation in the Child Care Grant Program but also strengthens community partnerships that support student success long after grant assistance ends.

Creating Student Ambassadors

Current or former Child Care Grant recipients can become powerful advocates.

Student-parent Ambassadors can:

- Share their stories.
- Participate in orientation.
- Assist with awareness events.
- Mentor other student-parents.
- Reduce stigma associated with seeking assistance.

Personal stories often resonate more strongly than brochures or emails.

Implementation Checklist

Communication Planning

- ☐ Develop an annual Child Care Grant communication calendar.
 - ☐ Create semester-based outreach campaigns.
 - ☐ Develop communication templates.
-

Marketing Materials

- ☐ Flyers
 - ☐ Posters
 - ☐ Social media graphics
 - ☐ Student success videos
 - ☐ Frequently Asked Questions
 - ☐ Website content
-

Staff Training

Train:

- Admissions staff
- Financial Aid
- Advising
- Student Success Coaches
- Faculty
- Workforce Development
- Continuing Education

Every employee should know where to refer a student seeking childcare assistance.

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- How many times does a student hear about childcare assistance each semester?
 - Which communication methods produce the greatest response?
 - Are online students receiving the same information as campus-based students?
 - How do we measure the effectiveness of our outreach?
 - Does every student-facing employee understand the Child Care Grant?
-

Quick Wins

Colleges looking to improve awareness immediately should consider:

- ✓ Adding Child Care Grant information to admissions acceptance emails.
 - ✓ Including childcare information in every orientation session.
 - ✓ Creating a "Student-parent Resources" webpage.
 - ✓ Sending semester-wide text message campaigns.
 - ✓ Producing short testimonial videos featuring student-parents.
 - ✓ Including childcare information in every financial aid appointment.
 - ✓ Displaying QR-code posters linking directly to registration or orientation information.
-

Leadership Spotlight

Visibility Creates Opportunity

Student-parents cannot benefit from resources they do not know exist.

Every email, flyer, text message, advising appointment, classroom announcement, or social media post represents another opportunity to remove barriers before they become obstacles.

The institutions that consistently achieve high utilization rates rarely have larger budgets. They simply communicate more intentionally, more consistently, and more compassionately.

CHAPTER 8

Leveraging CRM, Data, and Technology to Increase Child Care Grant Utilization

From Reactive to Predictive Student Support

For many years, colleges have administered childcare assistance as a reactive program. A student experiences a childcare challenge, contacts the financial aid office, and begins the application process. While this approach serves those students who seek assistance, it leaves many others unidentified.

Today's colleges have access to information that can help them recognize student needs long before a crisis occurs. Student information systems, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) platforms, financial aid records, advising notes, and early alert systems all contain valuable insights that can help institutions identify student-parents and connect them with available resources.

The goal is not simply to collect more data. The goal is to use existing information to remove barriers, personalize communication, and ensure that eligible students receive assistance before childcare challenges jeopardize their educational progress.

Technology should not replace personal relationships—it should strengthen them.

The Power of Data-Informed Decision Making

Every semester, colleges collect information that can help identify students who may benefit from childcare assistance. Unfortunately, these data points often exist in separate systems and are not intentionally used to support student-parents.

When institutions connect these data sources, they create opportunities to provide timely, personalized outreach.

Rather than asking students to discover the program, colleges can proactively invite them to explore available support.

Data-informed outreach also allows colleges to better forecast demand, monitor spending throughout the year, and ensure that available funding reaches students when it is needed most.

Strategic Opportunities for Action

Use Admissions and Enrollment Data

The admissions process provides an opportunity to begin identifying potential student-parents.

Consider collecting information such as:

- Dependent children in the household
- Childcare needs that may affect attendance
- Interest in student-parent resources

This information can be used to trigger future communications while respecting student privacy.

Leverage Financial Aid Information

Financial aid records often provide valuable indicators of student-parent status.

Potential indicators include:

- Students reporting dependent children
- Pell Grant recipients
- Independent students
- Students demonstrating exceptional financial need

While these indicators do not automatically establish eligibility, they can help identify students who may benefit from additional information about childcare assistance.

Integrate CRM Workflows

CRM platforms can automate communication and ensure that no eligible student is overlooked.

Examples of automated workflows include:

New Student-parent Campaign

Welcome students and introduce available childcare resources.

Semester Reminder Campaign

Remind student-parents that childcare assistance may be available for current expenses.

Receipt Submission Campaign

Encourage students to submit eligible invoices before established deadlines.

Registration Campaign

Highlight childcare assistance during course registration to reduce enrollment barriers.

Automation helps ensure consistent communication without increasing staff workload.

Develop Student-parent Dashboards

Data dashboards allow colleges to monitor utilization and identify trends throughout the academic year.

Suggested dashboard metrics include:

Student Engagement

- Number of student-parents identified
- Number contacted
- Number applying for assistance
- Number receiving awards

Financial Metrics

- Allocation received
- Funds awarded
- Funds remaining
- Average award amount

Student Success Metrics

- Retention rates
- Course completion
- Credential completion
- Persistence from term to term

Dashboards help institutions move from reacting to year-end balances to managing utilization proactively.

Use Early Alert Systems

Faculty and advisors are often the first to recognize when childcare challenges begin affecting student performance.

Colleges should consider adding childcare as a referral category within existing early alert systems.

Examples include:

- Frequent absences due to childcare
- Missed assignments related to family responsibilities
- Requests for schedule adjustments
- Student disclosures during advising

When these alerts are connected to student support staff, colleges can intervene before the student withdraws or stops attending.

Promising Practice

Predictive Student-parent Outreach

One institution analyzed admissions, financial aid, and advising data to identify students likely to have dependent children.

Rather than waiting for students to seek assistance, the college launched a targeted outreach campaign explaining available childcare resources.

Within one semester, the institution significantly increased the number of students receiving assistance and improved overall utilization of Child Care Grant funds.

The lesson was simple: students cannot benefit from programs they do not know about.

Innovative Utilization Strategy

Student-parent Success Dashboard

Consider developing a dashboard that is reviewed monthly by a cross-functional team representing:

- Financial Aid
- Student Services
- Enrollment Management
- Institutional Research
- Advising
- Foundation
- Workforce Development

During each meeting, review:

- Current utilization
- Remaining allocation
- Student participation
- Outreach effectiveness
- Upcoming communication campaigns
- Students needing follow-up

This approach transforms utilization from a year-end concern into an ongoing institutional priority.

Technology Integration Opportunities

Modern technology can support student-parents in many ways beyond communication.

Consider integrating childcare information into:

Student Portals

Provide easy access to eligibility information, FAQs, forms, and contacts.

Mobile Applications

Allow students to receive reminders, upload documents, and track application status.

Online Orientation Modules

Introduce childcare assistance to new students before classes begin.

Appointment Scheduling Systems

Enable students to schedule meetings with financial aid or childcare coordinators quickly and conveniently.

The easier colleges make it to access information, the more likely students are to participate.

Implementation Checklist

Data Collection

- ☐ Identify available student-parent data elements.
 - ☐ Review registration, orientation and financial aid forms for opportunities to collect childcare-related information.
 - ☐ Coordinate with Institutional Research to develop student-parent reporting.
-

CRM Integration

- ☐ Build automated communication workflows.
 - ☐ Create student-parent contact lists.
 - ☐ Schedule semester-based campaigns.
 - ☐ Develop reminder communications.
-

Dashboards

- ☐ Create utilization dashboard.
- ☐ Monitor spending monthly.
- ☐ Share progress with leadership.

- ☐ Review outcomes each semester.
-

Cross-Department Collaboration

- ☐ Include Financial Aid.
 - ☐ Include Advising.
 - ☐ Include Institutional Research.
 - ☐ Include Enrollment Management.
 - ☐ Include Foundation staff.
 - ☐ Meet quarterly—or monthly during high-utilization periods.
-

Questions for Institutional Reflection

- What student information do we already collect that could help identify student-parents?
 - Are our CRM tools being fully utilized to support outreach?
 - How frequently do we review childcare utilization data?
 - Which students are we not reaching?
 - How can technology reduce administrative burden while improving student access?
 - Are we measuring the impact of childcare assistance on student success?
-

Quick Wins

Institutions looking to strengthen data-driven utilization can begin by:

- ✓ Creating a student-parent CRM segment.
- ✓ Sending automated childcare awareness emails at the start of each semester.
- ✓ Developing a monthly utilization dashboard.
- ✓ Adding childcare as an early alert referral option.
- ✓ Including childcare assistance links in student portals.
- ✓ Reviewing utilization data with leadership each quarter.
- ✓ Coordinating outreach across multiple departments rather than relying on one office.