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## Find Child Care Resources for Community College Students

There are federal and state subsidies that can help community college students pay child care expenses.

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It's common for adults to go to school to increase their earnings and job growth potential. But for students with children, [paying for community college](#) and child care while balancing school and work can be a near-insurmountable hurdle.

"Managing child care, school responsibilities and often work can be extremely challenging, and the difficulties with child care can be one of the primary reasons that students with children have to take breaks from school, or possibly quit and never return," says Barbara Gault, vice president and executive director of the Institute for Women's Policy Research, a research organization that focuses on women's issues.

For one thing, child care is expensive. In many states the average cost of child care often exceeds the cost of housing, tuition, food and transportation, according to [a 2014 report from Child Care Aware of America](#). That makes the burden even heavier for low-income families, who make up a significant portion of the [community college](#) demographic.

[Learn more about why balancing [child care and college is a struggle for many students](#). ]

There are federal and state resources available for parents who want to go to school, but space and funding are limited, so prospective students need to research programs and apply early.

Students should start their search at a local child resource and referral agency. Parents can search by ZIP code, county and state on Child Care Aware's website to find their local agency.

"Most communities have resource and referral agencies that help adults find child care," says Gault. "They keep up-to-date lists of child care openings, they can help people find subsidized child care and apply for child care subsidies, if they might be eligible, and are a great resource for students who need help with finding child care."

She encourages students to start planning their child care strategy for the fall in the spring of the current year to decrease the chances of being wait-listed.

For example, [Wake Technical Community College](#) offers a grant of about \$600 a month to student parents. The [North Carolina](#) school sends a link to the grant to students who qualify for need-based aid based on their FAFSA, says Regina Huggins, dean of financial aid at the college. But the school only has funding for about eight students a year and grant recipients have priority over new applicants, which means that only a few spots are likely to open each year.

On-campus child care can help increase the chances of students completing a degree, experts say. Most states have at least one institution that offers [on-campus child care](#). But campus child care resources are declining, despite the increasing number of student parents, experts say. Rates at community colleges may be cheaper than other local options, but that varies by school and state and can depend on other funding that students get to help with child care expenses, like grants.

At [Mesa Community College](#) in Arizona, students can enroll their children ages 3 through 12, based on their class schedule, for \$4 an hour. Many parents end up paying less because of the federal and state funding that the center gets, says Kris Bliss, the director of support and retention programs at the school. The school cares for around 90 children a semester, but still usually ends up with students on the waiting list.

Parents need to research school facilities to make sure they are the best fit for their child and family, she says.

"You have to go and check the center out face to face," she says. "Asking a lot of questions is super important." She encourages students to look at the school's child center rating on the state licensing site.

Lindsey Cook, 31, was able to secure some [scholarships](#) to help cut costs, but she still had to take out student loans to fund her education and child care. Like many students, it took Cook longer than four years to finish her bachelor's degree. She went from a four-year university, to a community college and before finishing at [Robert B. Miller College](#), over the course of 10 years. Determined to make it through school without incurring debt, she paid for classes out-of-pocket until she had her daughter.

Cook knew that her job prospects would be better with a degree, so she used [subsidized loans](#) to pay for expenses because she knew she'd have a six-month grace period before her first payment was due after graduation.

Now a teacher, the [Michigan](#) resident is on a five-year plan to pay off her \$25,000 debt and planning to get a master's. She advises students to keep pushing through despite difficulties, fill out the FAFSA, apply for as many scholarships as possible – even if they think they won't get them – and take out [subsidized loans](#) if necessary.

"Sometimes you qualify for grants that you never knew existed," she says. "Just do it."

*Trying to fund your education at a two-year institution? Get tips, news and more in the U.S. News [Paying for Community College](#) center.*