

Community College *of* Philadelphia

Innovations for Economic Recovery: Childcare and College Students

Thursday, April 28, 2022 – 10:00 am to 1:00 pm

Testimony from Kelly Lake, CCAMPIS Project Director

Community College of Philadelphia

First, I want to thank Chair Muth, Senators Collet, Cappelletti, Schwank, and Comitta for hosting this hearing and bringing attention to the important issue of the challenges facing students and staff at institutions of higher education surrounding childcare. My name is Kelly Lake and I am the CCAMPIS Project Director at Community College of Philadelphia. CCAMPIS stands for Child Care Access Means Parents in School and it is a four year grant the College was awarded from the Department of Education during the fall of 2018.

I have been employed by CCP for a little over 3 years and in that tenure, I have exclusively been working to implement the CCAMPIS grant program. In my role, I work directly with our student-parents and have grown to know and understand all of issues they are facing while trying to juggle the responsibilities of being a college student and a parent. Our grant program is designed to assist low-income student-parents during the days and times they are in class or performing College-related activities. They must be in Good Academic Standing and registered for a minimum of 6 credits, or 3 credits for our Nursing and Allied Health students. Seems simple enough, however, we currently have 55 student-parents enrolled in our program. This is a very small percentage of student-parents at the College. If they currently receive Child Care Information Services/Early Learning Resource Center (CCIS/ELRC) subsidy, they do not qualify for our program. Those programs (CCIS/ELRC) provide a single point-of-contact for families, early learning service providers and communities to gain information and access services that support high quality childcare and early learning programs. Also, if they are working full-time during the day, we cannot pay for childcare coverage during that time. Our program is well designed and extremely helpful, however, there continue to be gaps of student-parents we are unable to assist. We provide a stipend paid directly to the childcare providers of \$1,000 per month, per child. Childcare costs are expensive – according to data from the Economic Policy Institute, childcare is one of the biggest expenses families face. In Pennsylvania, the average annual cost of infant care is \$11,842. That is 8.1% more than the average cost of rent. Additionally, our program is at the mercy of the U.S. Department of Education. Our current grant cycle is in Year 4 of funding and we are currently funded until September 30, 2022. We are in the process of asking the DOE for a no-cost one year extension and will be reapplying for another four-year grant cycle. However, if the DOE decides to not renew our grant, our program will end and the College has no other financial support programs in place for childcare. I can't imagine having to tell our student-parents that we can no longer help them. I don't know how they will be able to stay enrolled in College and persist to graduation without our program. That is my ultimate worry.

The student-parents we are currently serving rely on our program to provide them with childcare support so that they have time to attend class and complete their coursework. Especially with most of our classes occurring online, students need time to get their coursework and studying done. It is hard for

them to try to attend zoom meetings and complete homework while parenting. They are also often keeping up with housework, laundry, food shopping, cooking, and the list goes on. Being able to take the burden of childcare off their shoulders, is just one small piece of the puzzle to their success. I can't express the joy I feel when seeing our student-parents graduate from CCP. I am truly blessed to be able to help them on that journey. Outside of the financial assistance CCAMPIS offers them, we also host Parenting Education Workshops throughout the semester to provide them with information and takeaways from a variety of topics like child nutrition, CPR/First Aid training, child development, scholarship opportunities, financial literacy, how to juggle being a student-parent, and many more.

The college students we see now-a-days, especially at the Community College of Philadelphia, are non-traditional students who have a lot more going on than just being a student. They are also facing a number of challenges - homelessness, food insecurity, childcare issues, and so on. Without a program like CCAMPIS, I am confident that the success rates, enrollment, and persistence of student-parents would drop. The pandemic brought on a new on-set of challenges for student-parents. Childcare centers were closed for 3-4 months, some even longer, and some never re-opened. Our current struggle is finding a quality childcare center for student-parents that fits their needs since so many providers are now struggling with being properly staffed. We have many student-parents who sit on multiple waitlists just trying to get enrolled somewhere. A few providers we work with shared that they were unable to open additional classrooms because they did not have the staff to open rooms and have them properly covered to meet teacher to child ratios. As our classes continue to be held online, in person or in a hybrid schedule, the need for childcare has increased. It is imperative for us to have enough licensed, quality childcare facilities.

As a previous Preschool teacher and childcare center Director, I also know how low paying of a field childcare is. It becomes a challenge to recruit and maintain staff when they are not properly compensated for their work. There needs to be more funding for childcare centers and their staff. We need childcare funding outside of the CCAMPIS grant program. The CCAMPIS program would be a great supplemental program to have as back up, but there should be funding for student-parents that doesn't require grant funding from the Department of Education. I can't imagine in a few very short months having to tell our student-parents that they are on their own to figure out childcare. My position at the College, as well as our two other staff members, will cease to exist at CCP once our grant funding ends. The student-parents will have nowhere to turn to. I don't want to leave them in that situation.

I want to thank you again for your time and for shining light on this dire situation. I will gladly answer any questions about the CCAMPIS grant program and our student-parents.