

CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot Theory of Change

Heather Steed, Renee Ryberg, Diane Early, and Diana Gal-Szabo

One in five college students, or 22 percent, are parents.¹ They are highly motivated students and earn grades on par with or better than their childless peers.¹ However, child care challenges often lead student parents to leave school or workforce training without completing; shift from full-time to part-time schooling or programming; and miss, arrive late to, or leave early from school or work training.² In Georgia, women, single parents, parents with an annual household income under \$50,000 (particularly in South Georgia, where families' median household incomes are lower³), and parents under age 30 are most likely to report long-term employment or educational disruptions due to child care issues, blocking their path to fulfilling their educational goals and pursuing economic mobility.² Parents' inability to access consistent, reliable, and affordable child care is one of their biggest barriers to reaching these goals.⁴

Nearly one in five applicants to the Childcare and Parent Services (CAPS) program, administered through the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), identify as students; in May 2022, CAPS established student parents as a priority group for their program.⁵ Since then, more than 16,000 student parents have applied for CAPS. Yet only 42 percent of those applicants were approved for a subsidy. DECAL established the CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot program to test a strategy to better serve their student parent priority group at three technical college sites. This brief summarizes the theory of change behind DECAL's 2Gen Pilot and Child Trends' plans for evaluating the pilot. It was created in conjunction with DECAL, using funding from DECAL.

Theory of Change

This pilot aims to provide in-person supports to student parents by meeting them where they study. By assisting student parents to apply for a child care subsidy and providing wrap-around services using a family-centered coaching approach, the CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot aims to support student parents in

¹ Reichlin Cruse, L., Holtzman, T., Gault, B., Croom, D., & Polk, P. (2019). Parents in college by the numbers. Institute for Women's Policy Research and Ascend at the Aspen Institute. https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/C481_Parents-in-College-By-the-Numbers-Aspen-Ascend-and-IWPR.pdf

² Goldberg, H., Cairl, T., & Cunningham, T. J. (2018). Opportunities lost: How child care challenges affect Georgia's workforce and economy. GEEARS: Georgia Early Alliance Education for Ready Students. https://geears.org/wp-content/uploads/Opportunities-Lost-Report-FINAL.pdf?mc_cid=6c0469b117&mc_eid=8e9f72b4c0

³ HD Pulse. (2024). An ecosystem of minority health and health disparities resources. National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. https://hdpulse.nimhd.nih.gov/data-portal/social/map?race=00&race_options=race_7&sex=0&sex_options=sexboth_1&age=001&age_options=ageall_1&statefips_option=s=area_states&demo=00010&demo_options=income_3&socialtopic=030&socialtopic_options=social_6&statefips=13

⁴ Williams, B., Bitar, J., Polk, P., Nguyen, A., Montague, G., Gillispie, C., Waller, A., Tadesse, A., & Elliott, K. C. (2022). For student parents, the biggest hurdles to a higher education are costs and finding child care. The Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/resource/for-student-parents-the-biggest-hurdles-to-a-higher-education-are-costs-and-finding-child-care/>

⁵ Kasfir, E. (2012, August 24). *Welcome to the board of early care and learning: Federal programs updates—student parent pilot* [PowerPoint presentation]. Georgia DECAL Board Meeting, Atlanta, GA, United States. https://www.decaldga.gov/documents/BoardMeetings/2023-08-24_Board_Presentation.pdf

successfully reaching their educational goals, whether attaining a workforce credential or postsecondary degree.

Goals

The CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot aims to:

- Increase ease-of-access to high-quality care by assisting student parents with applying for child care scholarships and processing the applications quickly.
- Assist student parents in identifying and connecting to resources using Find Help Georgia.
- Assist families in identifying and applying for other state benefit services for which they may qualify through Georgia Gateway.
- Deliver family-centered coaching to support student parents in setting and pursuing educational or workforce goals.

Key Stakeholders

Pilot activities are intended to benefit student parents at three Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) campuses—including those enrolled in credit-bearing programs and adult education programs, as well as students involved in the regional WorkSource OneStop sites—strengthening partnerships between the TCSG system and DECAL. The pilot will be facilitated by one manager overseeing six student parent consultants (two at each campus) dedicated to assisting student parents in applying for, or participating in, CAPS. Student parent consultants will work onsite to assist student parents in-person, acting as a one-stop-shop to support them in enrolling in the CAPS program from start to finish and connecting student parents with wrap-around services using a family-centered coaching approach.



Strategy

Improve ease-of-access to high-quality child care by providing student parents with direct face-to-face access to on-site/on-campus consultants

Inputs

DECAL hires consultants (with lived experience as student parents, if possible) for each pilot campus

DECAL trains campus consultants to deliver culturally relevant case management on high-quality child care, wrap-around supports, and family-centered coaching

Activities

Consultants help student parents apply for and receive a CAPS child care scholarship

Consultants help student parents access referrals to state and community resources through Find Help GA

Consultants help student parents apply for other state benefits through Georgia Gateway

Consultants help student parents identify and address barriers to accessing stable, high-quality child care

Consultants deliver family-centered coaching to help student parents develop parenting, self-advocacy, and goal-setting skills

Consultants educate student parents around child development, developmental and disability screenings, and other needs

Outputs

Pilot enrollment reflects demographics of student parents disproportionately impacted by child care disruptions

Consultants deliver case management services with fidelity to training

Pilot participants report similar levels of satisfaction with case management services across all demographics

Short-term Outcomes

Across all demographics of pilot participants:

- Student parents access affordable and Quality Rated child care
- Student parents access resources and benefits through Find Help GA and Georgia Gateway
- Student parents set goals to progress toward educational or workforce program goals
- Student parents increase parenting skills, awareness of available supports, and self-efficacy

Intermediate Outcomes

Across all demographics of pilot participants:

- Student parents experience reduced stress
- Student parents have more money not used for child care
- Student parents have more time and energy for school and studying
- Student parents miss fewer classes or miss less work due to child care issues
- Student parents spend increased quality time with their child(ren)

Long-term Outcomes

Across all demographics of pilot participants:

- Student parents experience improved academic outcomes (e.g., taking more credits, completing a larger % of attempted credits, earning higher GPAs, increased likelihood to persist between semesters, reduced likelihood to be on academic probation)
- Student parents experience more stability and security (e.g., housing, financial, food, counseling, legal assistance, parenting, health care)
- Student parents complete their degree, certificate, or program

Evaluation

DECAL has contracted with Child Trends, a nonprofit research center, to serve as an external research partner to establish evaluation criteria and research questions to measure both family satisfaction with the pilot programming and any outcomes of the pilot. To the extent possible, this evaluation will compare student parent participants to student parents not participating in this pilot on several key outcomes, and by demographics, TCSG program enrollment, and work status.

The evaluation seeks to address the following research questions:

Research Question	Data Sources
How do stakeholders (i.e., student parents, DECAL, TCSGs) see the pilot? What was successful and what could be improved?	Student parent focus groups, pilot leadership interviews
How do student parents interact with the program?	CAPS data (workflow portal), pilot leadership interviews, student parent focus groups
How did participants learn about the pilot? How could outreach be improved?	Student parent surveys, student parent focus groups
Who are the participants? How do they compare to student parents who do not take part in the pilot? How do they compare to student parents who participate in CAPS but not through the pilot?	TCSG data, CAPS data (workflow portal), student parent surveys
What benefits do participants report from participating in the pilot?	Student parent surveys, student parent focus groups
What types of child care do pilot participants use? How easy/hard was it for them to locate this care? Does their child care arrangement meet their needs?	CAPS data, student parent surveys
How do pilot participants' short-term academic outcomes compare to student-parents who do not take part in the pilot?	TCSG data, CAPS data

Timeline

Front-end preparations (e.g., MOUs, data-sharing agreements, recruitment, hiring, and training) will take place over six months in 2023, and pilot promotion and delivery will take place for at least two years (2024-2025).

Limitations

The pilot evaluation relies on the accuracy of multiple data systems (CAPS and TCSG, including separate data systems for credit-bearing, adult education, and workforce development programs, and self-reported data from student parents) and our ability to successfully match cases across the data sources. While the theory of change outlines anticipated short-, intermediate-, and long-term outcomes, intermediate and

long-term outcomes may be difficult or impossible to measure given the short implementation period. For example, we do not anticipate being able to measure the pilot's impact on graduation and/or program completion rates within the two-year period of implementation. The student outcomes we can assess will also vary based on type of program (credit-bearing, adult education, or workforce development—and subgroups of programs within each of those options).

Limitations in the administrative data may also constrain our ability to make some comparisons of interest. TCSG does not identify all student parents in their data collection systems but does have an indicator to identify *single* student parents. Therefore, comparisons regarding educational outcomes will be limited to single student parents. The CAPS data system may also be limited in its ability to identify all parents in the student parent priority group. We will work with the CAPS data team to find the best comparison group(s). Finally, we will be unable to make causal claims about the role of the pilot in affecting participants' educational outcomes because we cannot control for all differences between students who do and don't take part in the pilot.

Suggested citation: Steed, H., Ryberg, R., Early, D., & Gal-Szabo, D. (2024). CAPS Student Parent 2Gen Pilot Theory of Change. Child Trends.