

DOE Awards Lee \$2 Million to Aid Student Parents

Hundreds of Lee College students who are parents will not have to worry about child care expenses, thanks to a \$2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program (CCAMPIS) grant is a "game changer" for sustainable childcare services funding.

"One of the primary reasons students who are parents drop out mid-semester or do not attend college at all is due to challenges with child care," said Kelli Forde Spiers, executive director of Student Engagement and Belonging. "Now, this grant will empower these mothers and fathers to prioritize their studies while their kids are in the care of professionals they choose."

According to the DOE, more than one in five students in the United States are parents, and 42 percent of all student parents attend community colleges. Many of these students must balance the demands of being primary caregivers or guardians for at least one child, and they face financial struggles while pursuing academic degrees and certificates.

The 2023 Hope Center Student Basic Needs survey sheds light on the challenges faced by student parents at Lee College. Among the 578 Lee College students surveyed:

- 38 percent are parents.
- 13 percent have missed three or more days of class because of lack of child care.
- 78 percent believe that child care is unaffordable.

"The CCAMPIS grant represents a significant step toward supporting the academic aspirations of our student parents while alleviating their financial burdens," said Dr. Lynda Villanueva, Lee College president. "By providing them with access to affordable, quality care, our students have a greater chance of obtaining a college degree, leading to successful, family-supporting careers."

The CCAMPIS grant will be administered through the Student Resource and Advocacy Center, which addresses unmet basic needs such as childcare services, food and emergency aid. During the 2022-2023 academic year and summer semester, SRAC provided financial assistance for child care to 81 Lee College student parents.

In addition to paying for licensed child care providers, funds from the four-year project will be used to hire a CCAMPIS Program Manager who will coordinate child care assistance, foster collaborative relationships with community child care vendors, develop campus programs and outreach for parenting students. It will also enable the installation of lactation stations/pods and changing stations around campus to make the campus more family friendly.

"The assistance offered through CCAMPIS will resolve the child care issue for 360 to 400 Lee College student parents during the grant program," said Selah Tacconi, interim executive director, Lee College Foundation. "We believe this will disrupt generational poverty in our community by enabling parents to work toward making a living wage."