

Parenting Students Need More Support Transferring to a Four-Year Institution



Parenting students work hard every day to pursue their goals, often juggling work, classes, and caregiving responsibilities. Public systems and programs can provide critical support, but frequently create additional hurdles for parenting students and their families—especially those with low incomes. In 2022, the Center for the Study of Social Policy and Project SPARC conducted research to better understand the barriers experienced by parenting students in CalWORKs, California’s cash assistance program for families with children.

This brief highlights findings from the research on parenting students’ experiences transferring to four-year institutions. Inadequate support for families’ basic needs combined with limited support at four-year institutions for parenting students who participate in CalWORKs are significant barriers for parenting students as they further their education.

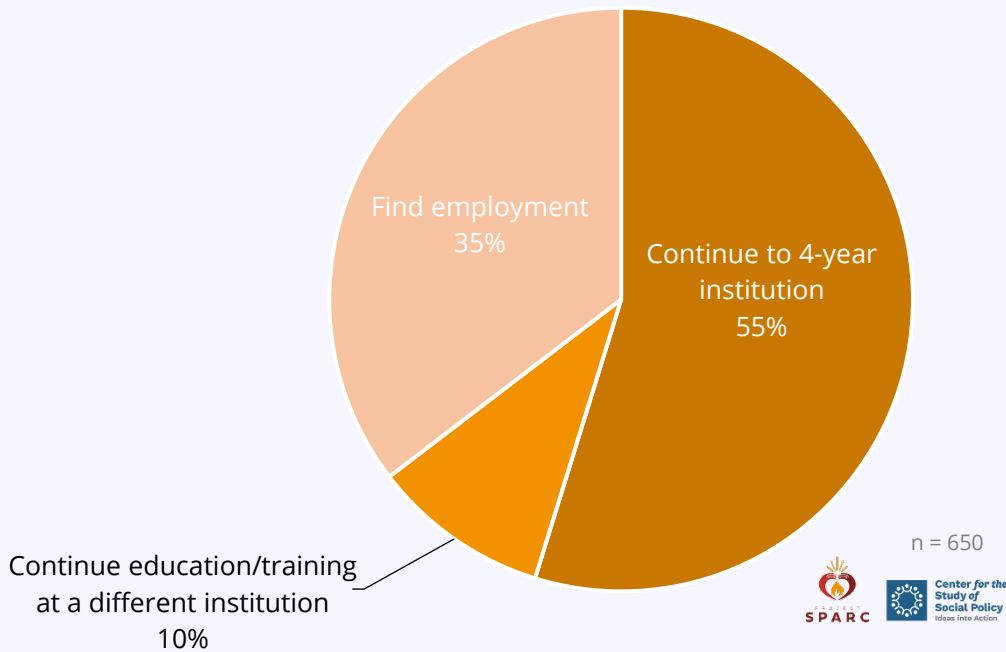
“ I've heard from students who are eligible for CalWORKs who transfer to the university [and they] wish they could stay with us [at the community college CalWORKs program]. They really like the community support... There aren't any CalWORKs programs that I'm aware of at the university level. [It's important to] have something else for parenting students at the university, and specifically for CalWORKs students.”

— MARTINA, A CALWORKS ADVISOR AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Parenting Students Need More Support Transferring to a Four-Year Institution

Many parenting students attend community college with a plan to eventually transfer to a four-year institution.

MORE THAN HALF OF PARENTING STUDENTS SAY THEIR GOAL IS TO TRANSFER TO A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION



When asked, "What is your primary education and career goal after you complete your community college program?"



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Though many parenting students want to transfer, they are often anxious about the process and not sure what to expect.

Parents often reported feeling nervous and uncertain about what will happen after they transfer, and concerned about the supports available for them at four-year institutions, especially with a lack of campus-based CalWORKS advisors to support



“ I know the program I'm in, they help you transfer, but I don't know anything about going to a university or transferring... I know I'm going to need a lot of guidance from the school for that. I'm saving that for when I get there.”

— CLARISA, A MOM OF TWO AND A STUDENT IN THE SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

“ I haven't officially spoken to anyone. I applied and received my acceptance... I honestly have no idea [what to expect]. My classmates who are transferring have the same consensus. We're all lost, but we're doing it.”

— GRACE, A MOM AND A STUDENT IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



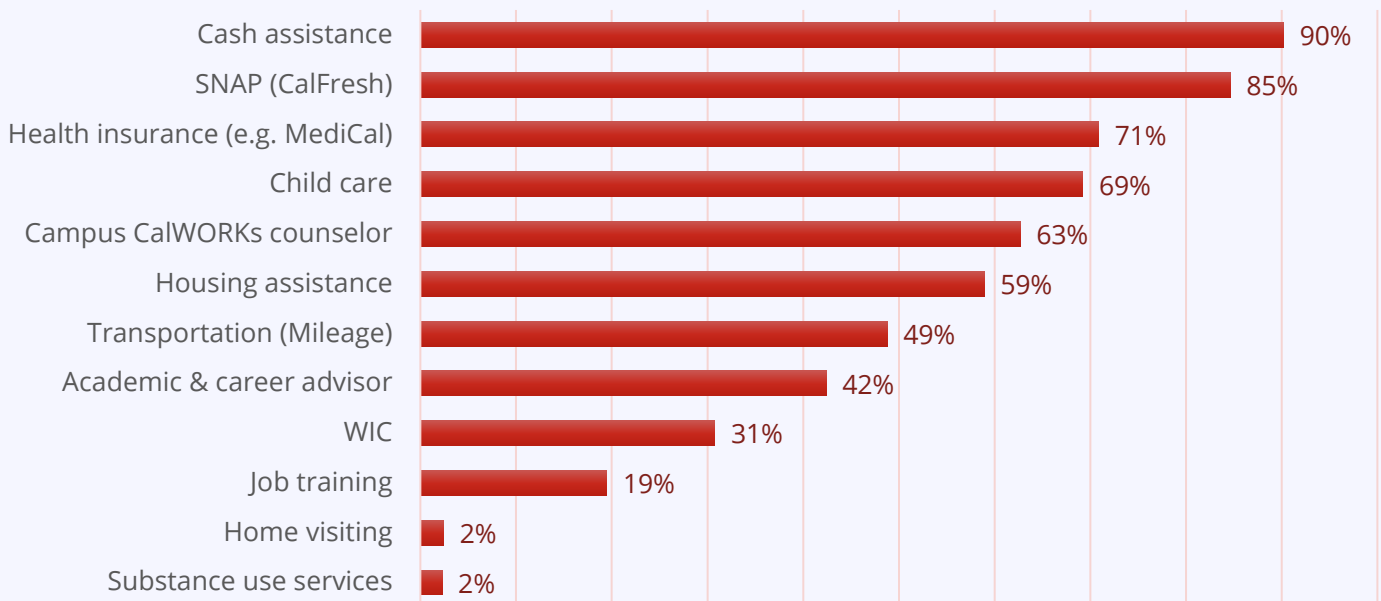
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Parenting students need more support to successfully transfer to a four year institution and accomplish their goals—including completing their degrees.

For parents to be able to focus on their education and career goals, their families’ basic needs have to be met first. Parents specifically highlighted the importance of cash assistance, food assistance, health insurance, child care, housing assistance, and transportation support—as well as direct support from a campus-based CalWORKs advisor—as necessary to achieve their goal of transferring to a four-year institution.

PARENTING STUDENTS NEED MORE SUPPORT MEETING BASIC NEEDS IN ORDER TO TRANSFER TO A FOUR-YEAR INSTITUTION



When asked, "If you plan to transfer to a four-year institution after graduating from community college, what supports do you think you will need in order to pursue your goals? (Select all that apply)"

n=611



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WHAT'S NEEDED NEXT

Parenting students need improved economic supports to meet their families' basic needs, as well as more support from four-year institutions, so they can pursue their goals.

“ Sometimes students have been through very challenging situations... and they think, 'I can't possibly put myself through school on the support I get through CalWORKs. I need to get a job.' There's outside pressures. I don't think it's that students don't have the potential... I think that there's just too many stressors that discourage them or just make it harder.”

— MARTINA, A CALWORKS ADVISOR AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

About the Research

In 2022, the CalWORKs Association's Project SPARC—a cohort of parenting CalWORKs students from California community colleges—partnered with the Center for the Study of Social Policy to co-design research to better understand the barriers experienced by parenting students participating in CalWORKs. In the spring and summer of 2022, SPARC and CSSP conducted in-depth interviews with 40 parenting CalWORKs students and 20 community college CalWORKs staff, as well as fielded a survey of 688 parenting CalWORKs students from across California. Data in this series of briefs are products of the research. The research found that while parenting CalWORKs students are highly motivated, they too often struggle to achieve their goals because public systems are not designed to meet families' needs and create barriers to their success.

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