



EDUCATION

Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success



April 30, 2013 More women than ever before — upwards of 4 million — are relying on community colleges for higher education and workforce preparation. Women at community colleges represent all ages, races, and ethnicities; include more than a million mothers; and have a range of goals. The main goal for many women is to gain job skills to be more competitive in the workforce. Mothers are motivated to pursue their education so they can better support their children and families. And for women who want a bachelor's degree, community colleges provide an

affordable path to achieving that goal.

Unfortunately, many women drop out before they can earn a certificate or degree or transfer to a four-year school. This report recommends policies and practices to help more women succeed in community colleges. Specifically, the report calls for increasing the availability of on-campus child care to help parents stay in school and outlines how community colleges can increase women's participation and success in nontraditional and high-demand science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields.

With increased attention and outreach to women students, the nation's community colleges can build on their legacy of providing educational opportunity to all. While this report may be of particular concern to women at community colleges, improving outcomes for women will benefit everyone.

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Here are some of the report's findings:

- Forty percent of undergraduates attend community colleges, and the majority of those who do are women.
- Students choose community colleges for their affordability, proximity to students' homes and work, and range of program offerings and degree options.
- Within six years of enrolling in community college, almost half of students have not completed a degree, received a certificate, or transferred. In other words, they drop out.
- Student parents who drop out of community college usually cite caregiving responsibilities and financial difficulties as their main reasons for leaving.
- In 2010, about 49 percent of community colleges provided on-campus child care, compared to 57 percent of four-year public schools and just 9 percent of four-year private schools.
- Community colleges offer certificates and associate degrees so students can prepare for STEM jobs that may not require a bachelor's degree, but women are still underrepresented in STEM fields at community colleges.
- Women are more likely than men to attend community college on the [way to earning a bachelor's degree in a STEM field](#).

Here are changes that can help support women at community colleges:

For federal data collectors

The main federal data system for higher education (the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, or IPEDS) does not adequately report outcomes for community college students. If we expect community colleges to do more in the next decades, we need to have access to better information — we must address the limitations of our current data collection and reporting systems.

For educators and administrators

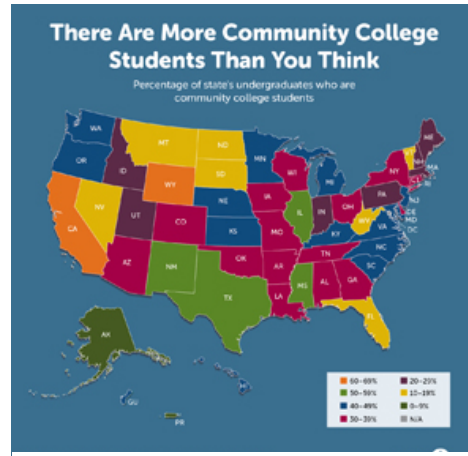
Educators and advisers at community colleges should be aware of **gender stereotypes** and how they can negatively influence a student's experience. As a key point of contact for students, academic advisers can play a proactive role by promoting nontraditional careers like STEM to women students.

For Congress

Congress should increase funding for the Campus Child Care Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program, which is the main federal source for on-campus child care funding.

For everyone

Community college administrators, local support groups, and Congress can all **take steps** to increase the availability of child care to meet the needs and demands of the growing population of student parents who attend community colleges.



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See Your State's Report Card on Community Colleges

While the report offers data at the national level on community colleges, the numbers at the state level tell their own stories.



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