

Mount Wachusett Community College Meets Student Parent Needs through Utilizing the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit

Mount Wachusett Community College (MWCC) is a small school of about 4,000 students in a rural part of Central Massachusetts. Like many other colleges, it has seen a rise in its student parent population in recent years. MWCC is fortunate to have a federal Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) grant, which subsidizes child care and support services for a limited number of students. However, the College has many more parents enrolled in their programs, and administrators predict that targeted supports for this larger population will lead to greater retention and academic success.

MEET ARIELLE BIBEAU

Arielle Bibeau is a 24-year-old single parent with two young children, both of whom attend the on-campus child care center at MWCC. In addition to attending school full-time, she also works as a nursing assistant at a nearby prison. Arielle first enrolled at Mount Wachusett when she was a new mom at age 18, then returned after taking time off to have her second child. When she was accepted into the CCAMPIS program, she finally began to receive the support she needed as a young single mother. It was the CCAMPIS advisor who helped her change direction when her original participation in the nursing program became unworkable; she has been a successful student ever since. She will graduate with two associate degrees in May 2020, in criminal justice and allied health, and has been accepted into the police academy.

Arielle also plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in criminal justice in Fall 2020.

“A day in the life of a student parent is one of the most difficult things to handle. Most days I remind myself, ‘I can do this, and it will be worth it in the end.’ If I am really struggling, I go to my CCAMPIS advisor and she always manages to help me get back on track when I feel like my plate is overfilled.”

—Arielle Bibeau,
Class of 2020



Arielle Bibeau and her children Braelyn and Billy.

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes

The Family Friendly Campus Toolkit is a no-cost, award-winning self-assessment system and guide for improving supports and outcomes for students who are raising children. Two- and four-year colleges and universities have used the Toolkit's resources to:

- **raise awareness about the strengths, needs, and challenges of student parents;**
- **increase visibility of existing supports and improve services;**
- **learn about recommended practices;**
- **develop new resources devoted to student parent success.**

The Toolkit includes:

- a student parent survey;
- a list of recommended practices;
- a profile of existing services;
- guidance for setting up a Task Force, collecting institutional data, and conducting focus groups;
- action and dissemination plan templates and other resources.

To download the Toolkit, please visit:
familyfriendlycampustoolkit.endicott.edu

PROCESS AND PLAN

MWCC has been supporting student parents for many years. It has a student parent support group, annual toy fair, food pantry, on-campus child care center, and the CCAMPIS grant, which serves 24 students each semester. The CCAMPIS students have monthly check-ins with the program advisor and attend monthly workshops which help them keep their GPA in an acceptable range. However, **Student Services staff have heard many stories from other parenting students about their struggles to succeed and stay in school.** These stories prompted the College to implement the *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes*, so they could assess their current resources, hear directly from more of their student parent population, and make plans to meet the needs of these students.

The first step was to create a task force that reflected the college community, comprised of 14 active members. This led to some immediate changes and actions. For instance, after reviewing the College's existing resources and policies relevant for student parents, this information was posted on a Student Services Blackboard page. The task force also completed a self-assessment recommended practice rubric. Next, the Toolkit Student Survey was adapted and distributed online, in classrooms, and in hallways.

The biggest takeaway from the survey responses was the need for a place for student parents to gather and study on campus, with or without children. As a result, the College has assigned space for a Family Resource Center. It will eventually house computers, toys,

and be a site for clothing swaps and workshops. The center will also make it easier for parents to organize child care exchanges. Survey responses have already led to some other changes as well, including special tutoring times and access for parents with children in the library, and encouraging faculty to publicize family-friendly policies on syllabi. **The results of the survey have been shared widely, educating faculty and staff about MWCC's student parents and their needs, and leading to a noticeable increase in the amount of discussion about related issues. Faculty were particularly surprised by the number of times parents have dropped out and come back to school.** MWCC also plans to use data and outcomes from the Toolkit to create marketing materials to entice parents to return to school.

“With the help of the Family Friendly Campus Toolkit, we have spent the past year building a team of concerned students, staff, faculty, and administrators who are all deeply invested in making our campus more inclusive, welcoming, and accommodating to our student parents. It is our hope to continue to invest in this work, using the Toolkit as our blueprint and catalyst for innovation and improvement.”

—Jason Zelesky,
Dean of Students
Mount Wachusett
Community College

Ann Reynolds, Campus Advocate

Ann Reynolds began her time at Mount Wachusett Community College in 2009 as a student parent of four teenage children, and has been associated with the College ever since. Several degrees later, she currently divides her time between her responsibilities as a CCAMPIS advisor and an academic disability counselor. In both positions, she does whatever it takes to help students stay in school, addressing both academic and non-academic challenges. One of her favorite things is when student parents realize that so much more is possible when they succeed in school. Ann has been leading the Toolkit effort at MWCC and is pleased with the process. “I’m so excited that we will now have a Family Resource Center on campus, so that every parent has a chance to get support and no parent has to fall through the cracks. I’m glad that the Toolkit helped the College recognize that this is what we need.”

Ann Reynolds
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The *Family Friendly Campus Toolkit: Using Data to Improve Outcomes* was developed by the Program Evaluation and Research Group (PERG) at Endicott College, with support from the U.S. Department of Education and Lumina Foundation. For more information, contact Joan Karp at jkarp@endicott.edu or Elizabeth Osche at eosche@endicott.edu.

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familyfriendlycampustoolkit.endicott.edu**