



Higher Education Should Be Accommodating

Policymakers can allocate funding for wraparound support services to accommodate educational success for working adult learners.

Working adult learners have different needs than traditional-aged students, and institutions can accommodate these learners by offering flexible, dynamic, and diverse services. Because working adult learners often manage multiple competing priorities, education and training programs must provide flexibility in accommodating students' schedules and family obligations while maximizing prior learning and providing a potentially shortened time to a degree at a lower cost.

Working adult learners are often caretakers and full- or part-time employees. They are also frequently unfamiliar with academic settings after pausing their studies. Because of these additional life circumstances, policymakers can advocate for wraparound support services that address academic and nonacademic needs, which can be extremely valuable for working adult learners.²²

For example, a parent working minimum wage would need to work about 52 hours per week to afford both childcare and tuition at a four-year public institution.²³ This is an untenable workload; working adult learners say the main reason they have some college but no degree is that they

could not balance the demands of both work and school.²⁴ State policies that support caretakers with financial aid beyond tuition can help alleviate the many demands on their time.

Working adult learners from diverse communities can also benefit from one-on-one support services. Because white learners are 2.5 times more likely to graduate from a public college than Black learners and 60% more likely than Latino learners,²⁵ policies designed to support the whole learner inside and outside their academic studies are essential in closing educational achievement gaps.



Learner Profile

Rosa Ballenilla Mateo

New York

B.A. Educational Studies

At the age of five, Rosa emigrated from the Dominican Republic with her family and faced challenges including learning a new language and a new culture.

Rosa uses her own experience as an immigrant to help others find their way. Her commitment to helping kids enter a path to success in education is her greatest strength. Rosa earned her bachelor's degree in educational studies in elementary education from WGU in 2022.

Policy Recommendations in Action

Develop policies to increase wraparound support.

States can help learners access federal funds such as the Child Care Access Means Parents in School Program, which allowed 287 institutions to establish childcare programs in 2020.²⁶ **Oregon** HB 2835 requires select state institutions to hire staff members who can help eliminate bureaucratic barriers to accessing financial benefits.²⁷

Support emergency financial aid programs.

Almost two-thirds of community college students cannot cover unexpected expenses over

\$500.²⁸ **Wisconsin** §36.66 distributes state-appropriated emergency funds of up to two \$500 grants to eligible students for financial emergencies.²⁹ **Minnesota** HF 7 allocates funds to assist students with immediate needs that may become barriers to completion, including emergency housing, food, and transportation.³⁰

Increase resource visibility.

Minnesota HF 7 requires community and technical colleges across the state to maintain a webpage detailing the basic needs resources available at the college and university, including contact information for each.³¹

WGU in Action

WGU has partnerships with 615 colleges throughout the United States and has implemented 7,921 transfer pathways. As a result, college graduates can access generous transfer privileges by being awarded transfer credit if their institution is recognized as nationally or regionally accredited by the U.S. Department of Education.

WGU also offers a free transcript service to help students gather and submit transcripts and grants additional credits on a course-by-course basis.

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