The CALIFORNIA ALLIANCE *for*
STUDENT PARENT SUCCESS

ADMINISTERED BY CALIFORNIA COMPETES: HIGHER EDUCATION FOR A STRONG ECONOMY AND EDTRUST–WEST

AB 2458: The GAINS for Student Parents Act

IMPLEMENTATION FACT SHEET

SUMMARY

On September 29, 2024, Governor Newsom signed The Greater Accessibility, Information, Notice, and Support for Student Parents Act (AB 2458, "the GAINS Act") into law, which will help student parents afford, enroll in, and successfully complete their higher education journeys. Specifically, this bill calls on colleges to:

- Account for child care expenses in financial aid calculations so that student parents have access to the financial aid they are eligible to receive; and
- Collect and report data to advance student parent success.

This fact sheet describes the GAINS Act's legal components and the responsibilities of public higher education segments and institutions.

WHAT DOES THE GAINS ACT REQUIRE?

California is currently home to about 300,000 undergraduate and 100,000 graduate student parents. This new law requires the California Community Colleges and the California State University—and requests the University of California—to account for dependent care expenses in financial aid calculations, which facilitates student parents' access to the financial aid for which they are eligible, and collect and report student parent data.

The law requires the following:

1. Comprehensive information on colleges' student parent web pages, beginning January 2025;
2. Public higher education segment cost of attendance (COA) policies that account for student parent expenses by July 2025;
3. Campus implementation of COA budgets that adhere to their respective segment's policy by fall 2026;
4. Updated campus net price calculators (NPCs) to provide baseline student parent cost estimates, disaggregated by age and number of dependent children by fall 2026; and
5. Higher education segments' data collection on student parents to share with the California Cradle-to-Career (C2C) data system by fall 2026.

WHAT IS THE C2C DATA SYSTEM?

C2C is the statewide longitudinal data system that provides tools to help students reach their goals and delivers information on education and workforce outcomes.

By fall 2026, public higher education segments must collect student parent data in their respective systemwide data management information systems and share it with C2C.

LEARN MORE

For more information, visit the GAINS Act Implementation Web Page or contact your institution's or segment's leadership.

WHAT ARE CAMPUS STUDENT PARENT WEB PAGES?

Student parent web pages, created by [AB 2881](#) (2022), provide information about resources available both on and off campus that can support student parents' participation and success in higher education.

Beginning January 2025, institutions must update these web pages with additional information about several federal and state tax credits, financial aid programs, public benefits, and the dependent care allowance. Campuses must update this information each spring and fall semester or quarter thereafter.

WHAT IS COST OF ATTENDANCE?

COA, as established in the federal Higher Education Act, is a campus's determination of the tuition and non-tuition expenses a student will need to pay to attend in a given year.

By July 2025, public higher education segments must develop COA policy guidance that accounts for student parent expenses, including dependent care. And by fall 2026, campuses must update and implement campus COA budgets based on guidance that their higher education segment provides.

WHAT IS THE DEPENDENT CARE ALLOWANCE?

Unlike their nonparenting peers, student parents have additional expenses, including child care, which are not generally accounted for in colleges' COA estimates. Federal regulations allow financial aid administrators to adjust a student's COA to include the expenses they incur for dependent care; however, institutions often do not take full advantage of this federal flexibility, resulting in unnecessary burdens on students and financial aid administrators. In fact, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that student parents are not maximizing their federal financial aid.

Instead, students typically need to individually request an adjustment—a "dependent care allowance"—from financial aid administrators, but students often do not know this option exists. In some cases, administrators may ask student parents to provide further proof of their dependent care costs or incorrectly deny adjustments.

The GAINS Act ensures that higher education institutions streamline the dependent care allowance for student parents' COA budgets so that they should only have to make an adjustment request if their expected expenses exceed the amount the school sets.

WHAT IS A NET PRICE CALCULATOR?

NPCs provide prospective students with an estimate of what they can expect to pay out of pocket after grants and scholarships, given their basic financial profile. NPCs ask prospective students if they have a dependent child to help determine whether they must also include their own parents' financial information in the calculation, but NPCs have not used that question to estimate prospective students' own dependent care costs.

By fall 2026, campuses must update their NPCs to include a baseline student parent cost estimate, disaggregated by age and number of dependent children, to account for expenses such as child care.

CONTACT US

To learn more about the GAINS Act and ways to support student parents, please visit castudentparentalliance.org or email The Alliance at StudentParentSuccess@californiacompetes.org.