

Austin Single Mothers, Poverty and College

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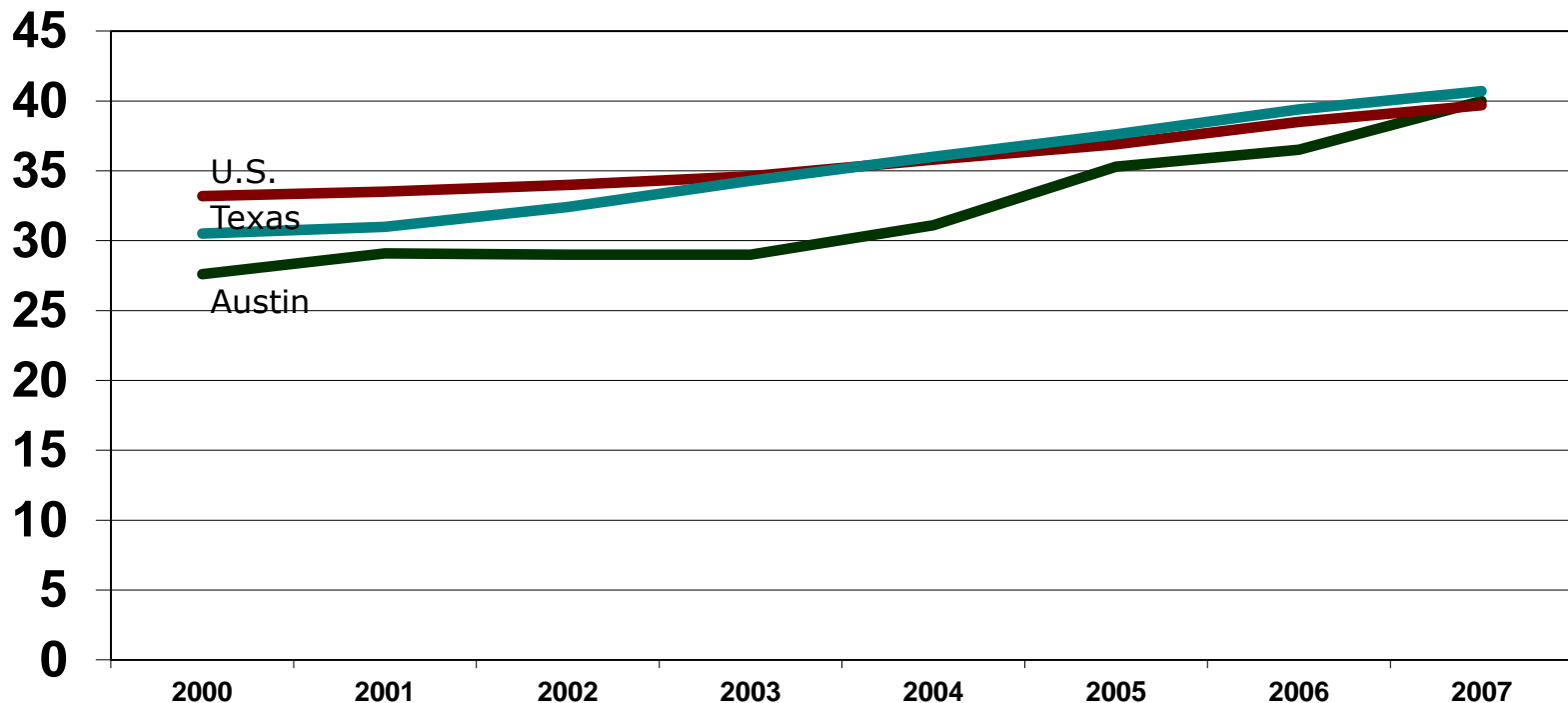
Austin American-Statesman

Sunday, February 20, 2011

Editorial – 2010 U.S. Census

“...high out-of-wedlock birth rates....In Texas, as elsewhere in the nation, the notion of family, across ethnicities, has changed as more families try to get by with only one on-premises parent. *We will not pass judgment on that trend, but it is an undeniable one that is having an undeniable effect on our society. It cannot be ignored.*”

% of Births to Unmarried Women From 5% in 1960 to more than 40% today

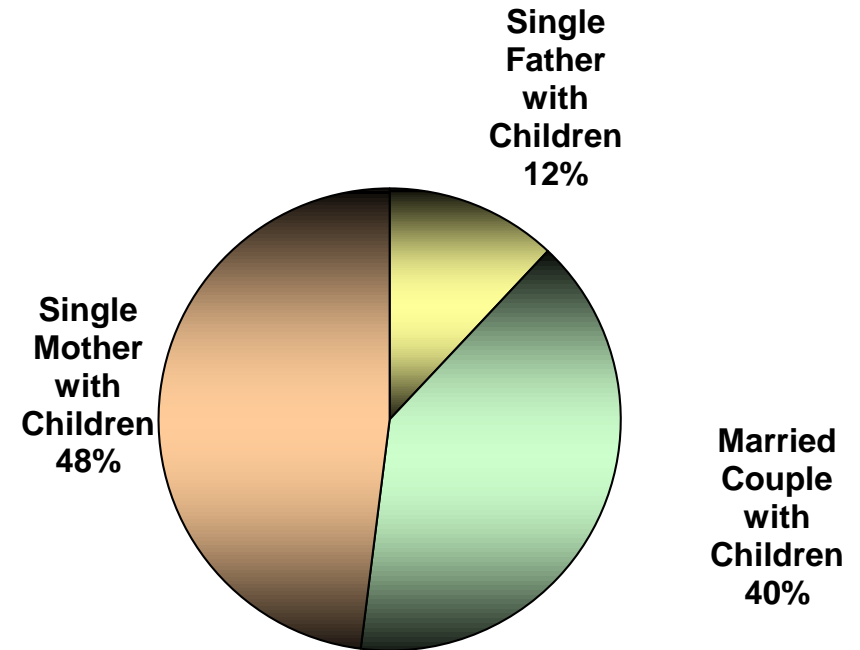


In 2007, the percent of births to unmarried women in Austin surpassed the overall U.S. percentage for the first time.

Nearly 15,000 single-mother families living in poverty with almost 40,000 children

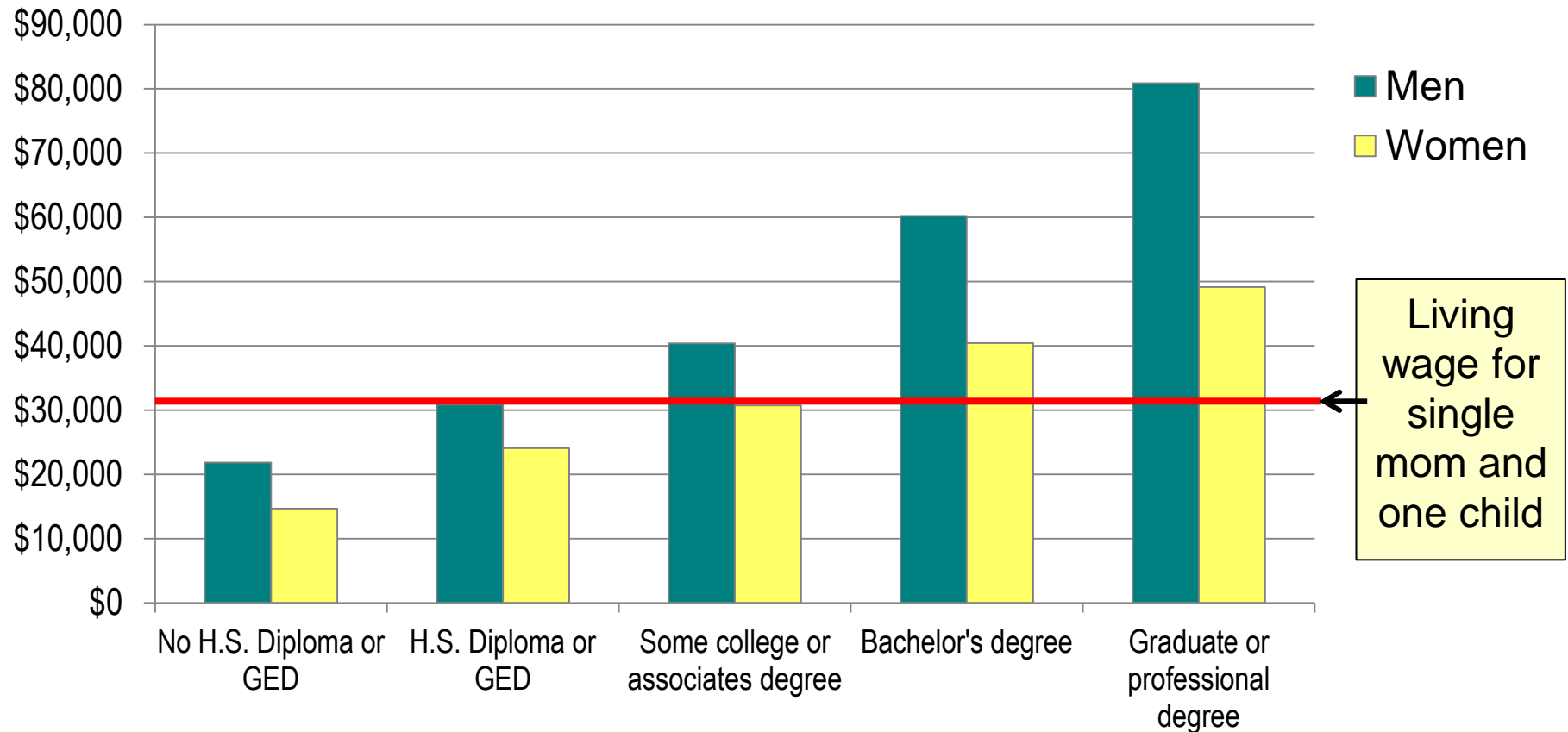
Single-mother households are 4 times more likely to be living in poverty than married couple households

Families with Children Under 18 Living in Poverty by Household Type



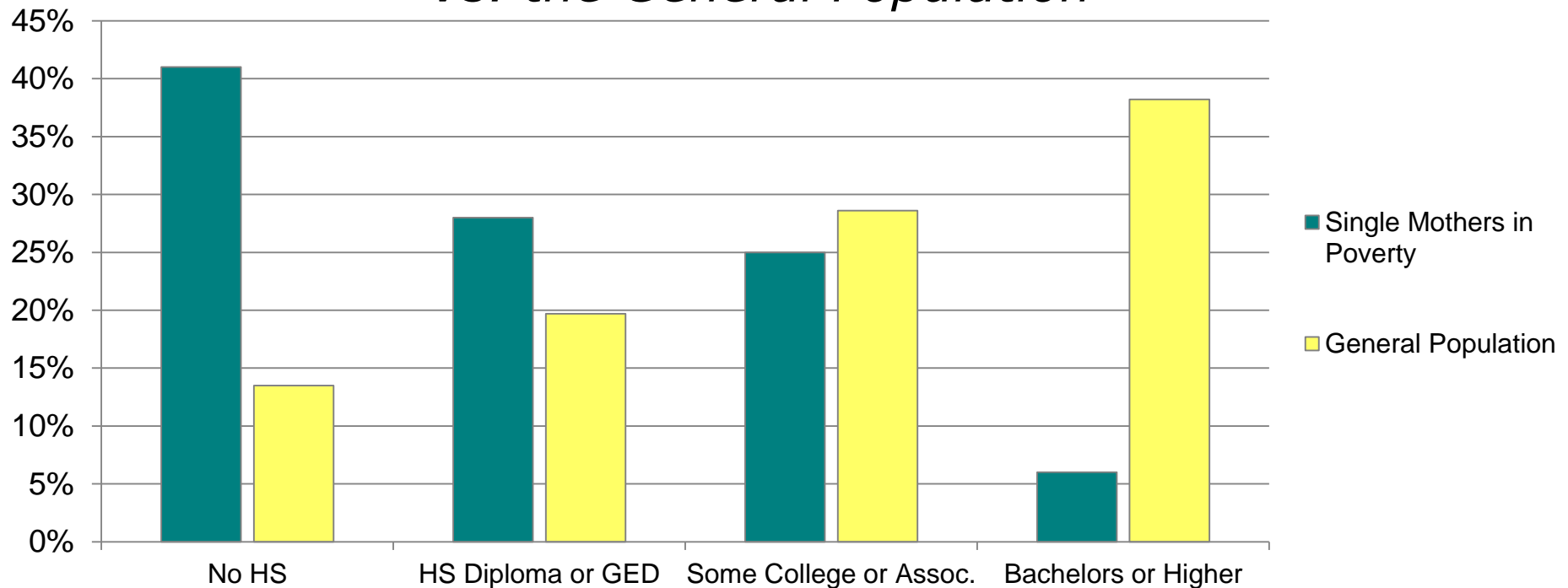
Single-mother households are 21% of all families with children under 18, but nearly half of the families living in poverty.

Income by Education and Gender



Single mothers median income: \$31,000

Educational Attainment of Single Mothers in Poverty Vs. the General Population

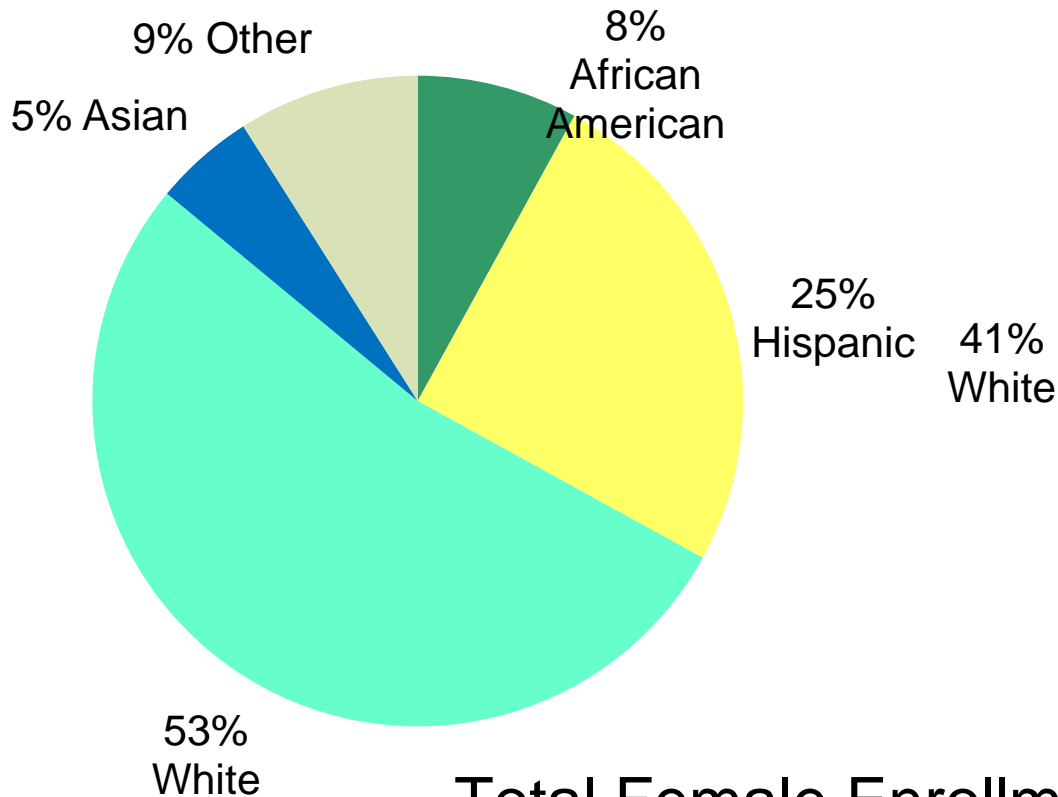


Mother's educational level is one of the most influential predictors of a child's educational success.

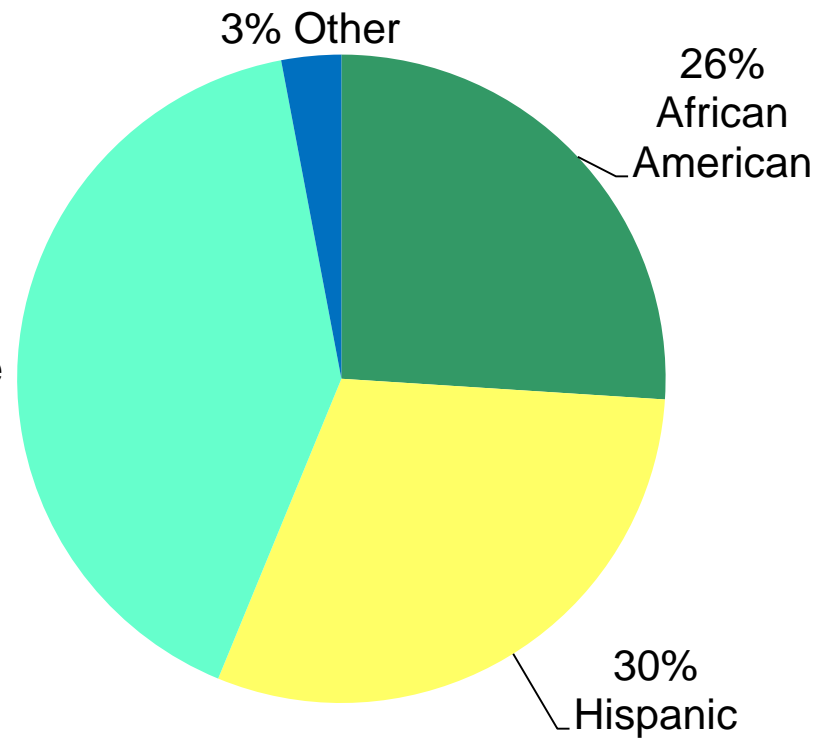
More education = higher earnings.

ACC Race/Ethnicity

Overall ACC



Support Center



Total Female Enrollment: 56%

Austin Community College and Single Moms

Women in Support Center Program:

Fall 2010: 462 applied, 261 received direct assistance

Spring 2011: 551 applied, 241 received direct assistance

Average annual income per family member: \$ 4,018

Total Childcare Funds Disbursed (10-11): \$340,000

Average Childcare/Student/Semester (09-10): \$ 2,404

Austin Community College and Single Moms

Graduates/Transfers in 09-10 Support Center Program:

11 (7.4%) of 148 graduated

11 (7.4%) of 148 transferred

Fall to Spring persistence overall at ACC: 67%

Fall to Spring persistence of 148 in Support Center: 93%

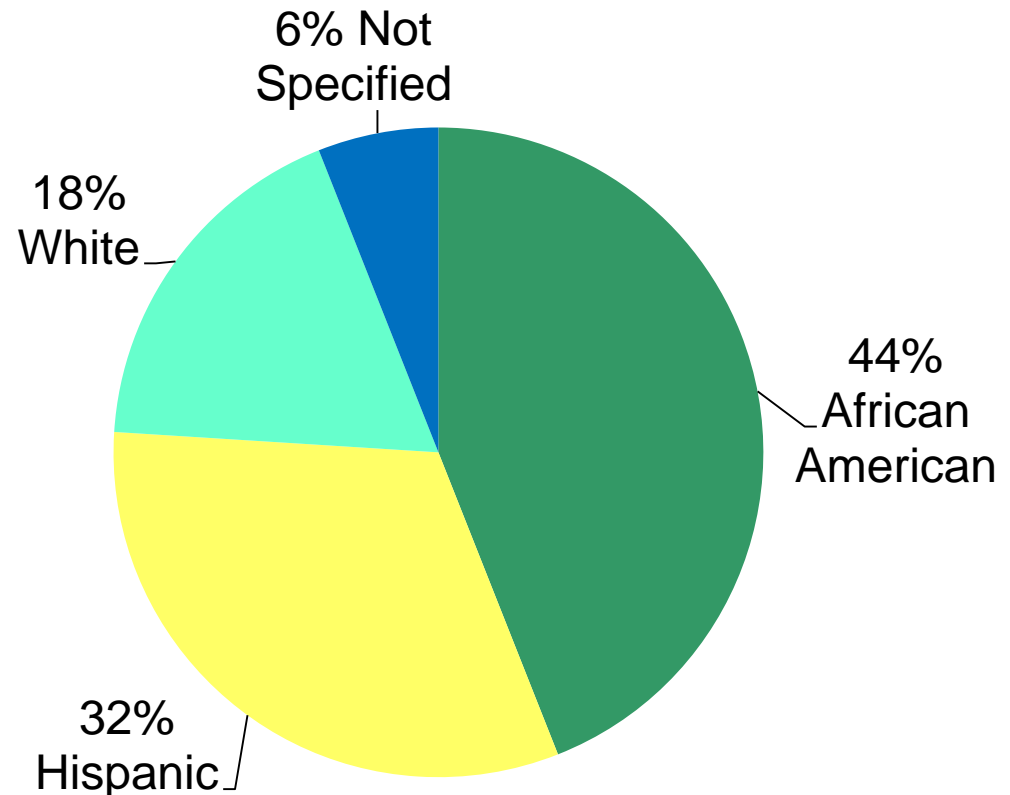
Fall 2010 Focus Groups at ACC

Goal of understanding:

- Challenges they face;
- Services they access or wish they could access;
- Thoughts on participating in a housing-based, integrated services, dual-generation program.

Demographics of the participants

- Ages 19-41, but average 25.
- Three-quarters were women of color.
- 61 children (almost 2 per family)



But who are they really?

19-year old mom with a toddler. Her own mother has less than an 8th grade education, and her father never graduated from high school. She works more than 30 hours a week, helps out her “struggling” parents, and hopes to get a bachelor’s degree one day. She says she has never received help from any nonprofit in town. She leaves her child with family while she works and goes to school, but says she really doesn’t trust anyone.

But who are they really?

40-year old mother with a one-year old daughter and an older child, lost her job and decided to go back to school because “I wanted a better life for my kids.” She is going to college for the first time and has to ride the bus. She says she really “just wants to be self-sufficient.” “When you start depending on people, you get let down.”

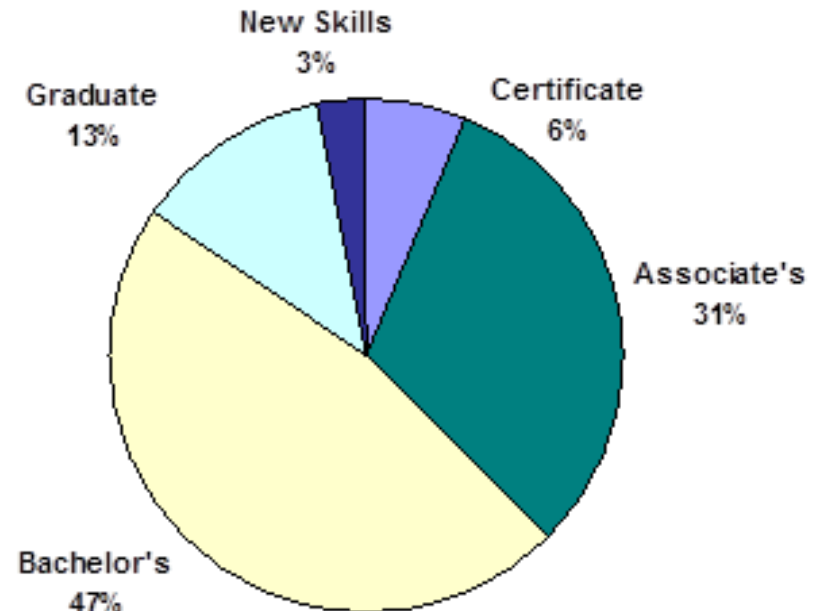
“What is your desired educational goal?”

36% have both mothers and fathers with less than a high school education.

60% hope to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher.

But nearly half had less than 14 credits.

And 55% are enrolled part-time.



Financial Supports

- Almost all have grants/scholarships. Only 2 have financial support for college expenses from parents/grandparents.
- Half are employed and 25% work more than 30 hours a week.
- Most of the women are receiving public assistance, including:

Food Stamps	76%
Medicaid	65%
WIC	50%
Subsidized/public housing	32%
TANF	12%

Childcare

- The women overwhelmingly indicated that childcare arrangements are difficult to make and that finding affordable, quality childcare is difficult.
- Nearly 60% leave their children with relatives, friends or neighbors. 30% use a licensed center. The remaining use a registered family home, a paid sitter, and older siblings.
- Only 29% receive childcare tuition assistance, primarily from ACC.

Safety is a huge issue

What the women said about childcare....

“If I feel that my children are not being taken care of, then my mind will not be into whatever else I am doing.”

“You get what you pay for...I pay \$400 a month...the thing is that I know she is not changing her enough...what do you do?”

“My 10-year old, we’ve had a really hard time finding after school care...So, right now, I have my baby have a cell phone and ride her bike...and it’s fixing to be 40 degrees outside...especially with the way things are now. You just don’t know. And I sit there and I have to get out of class every day and stay on the phone with her for 15 minutes while she rides her bike home just to make sure...but trying to find a place that not only picks them up, that’s affordable. It’s hard, especially when you work til 6:00 and they they gotta be picked up by 6:00.”

“I had to miss class today because I didn’t have anyone to watch my little one.”

Housing

- 1/3 receive financial assistance with rent or live in public housing.
- 1/3 live with family or friends.
- The rest receive no financial assistance with housing.

Safety is a huge issue

What the women said about housing....

“I don’t even know where to go for help.”

“No time to go out and spend 45 minutes to one hour looking for help.”

“The waiting list can take you anywhere from two to seven years.”

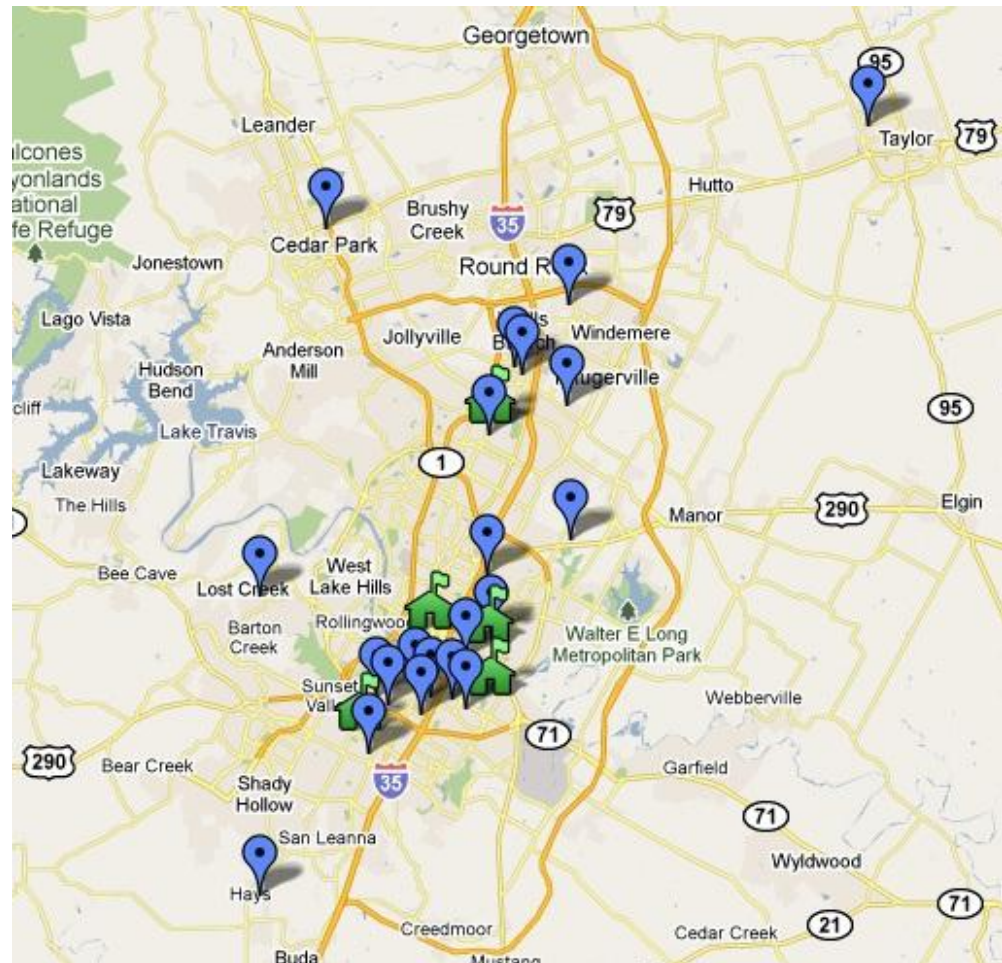
“I live in a very bad neighborhood. A man just got shot on the corner. You can’t even go to the bus stop without finding “something” on the ground.”

“I agree with you about staying in the crappy place, because I do, too. You know, it’s not the best neighborhood. The reason I am there is because I have to pay for childcare.”

“With some of the housing programs you have to work this much. If you want to work more to get better childcare or pay off bills, then you’re screwed. So there’s no incentive to do better. That’s why I chose to stay away (from getting help).”

Transportation

The women's homes are widely dispersed, but they primarily attend Eastview, Northridge and South Austin campuses.



Transportation

Most (75%) use their own car as their primary means of getting to classes, but about 25% of those using their own car have frequent problems with it not running or not having gas. The most frequent transportation alternative to their own car is buses (about 25% of the women) or catching a ride with family or friends (21%).

“Riding the bus is hard and it’s time consuming and it means less time at work and less time with the kids.”

“I spend 3-4 hours on the bus every day...”

“I think they should have shuttle transportation (at ACC)”

Other Support

- Four (4) women were currently receiving services from a nonprofit organization:
 - 1 - LifeWorks and Easter Seals
 - 2 - Capital IDEA
 - 1 - Communities in Schools (and Workforce Solutions)
- The organization most frequently mentioned as either currently providing services to the women (3 mentions) or their children, or having provided such services in the past (12 mentions), is Workforce Solutions.
- Other organizations the women most often mentioned using in the past:
 - 7 – LifeWorks
 - 6 – Caritas
 - 5 – Any Baby Can
 - 4 – Communities in Schools

How do they learn about organizations or services that might be available to help?

- Friends and/or Family 62%
- ACC 35%
- Online 15%
- United Way 211 6%

*"We just feel like a burden on our families."
"I don't depend on anyone, quite frankly."*

What do they say they need?

- Safe, affordable childcare, and childcare onsite or coordinated with for-profit centers near campuses.
- A safe, affordable place for to live.
- Transportation.
- Support/community
- Tutoring and tutoring groups.
- Counseling services; better access to mental health support.
- Parenting classes.

Why do they pursue their education, even with the barriers?

“My older boys are the ones that make me get up because they are very proud that I am in school.”

“Definitely my girls...and definitely getting something where I can move on up.”

“I want to be a role model to my daughter. I want her to go to college.”

“I feel like I could be a different person today if my parents were educated. I want that for my child.”

“Independence, self-sufficiency and showing my child that you can do anything.”

“I want the American dream...white picket fence, dog, and a car.”

Recommendations

- **Collect more data** on this vulnerable group. Recognize them as a unique group to be tracked and supported.
- Make it easier for them to get **information** and accessing what they are eligible for.
- Advocate for increasing (or at least maintaining) funding for programs like **need-based awards** (Pell grants) and **childcare subsidies**.
- Support **workforce and education programs specifically for single mothers** that focus on more than short-term job placement.
- **Support programs are comprehensive and more easily accessible.** Expand support services where the families are: at point of affordable housing (integrated, comprehensive) like permanent supportive housing for homeless. Transformative housing for single mother families.

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