Fostering Higher Education: Strategies for Student Success

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The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research

- A **leader in child welfare system reform**, utilizing an interdisciplinary approach to research-informed policy and practice innovation
- Identified **barriers to higher education for foster youth** as a significant issue
- Interested in learning about **national best practice** that may improve educational outcomes for foster youth, with an eye toward recommending policy reforms and practice innovations
- Developed **Foster Care to College (FC2C) work group** to engage PA stakeholders in conversations to improve outcomes

College Success for youth in foster care:
What does the current landscape look like and why does it matter?

Background Data – K-12 Statistics

National and multi-state studies indicate great disparity in educational outcomes for foster youth as compared to the general population

- Over 50% of foster youth change schools when entering care

- 1/3 of foster youth have experienced 5+ school changes

- Foster youth are absent from school 2x as often as peers

- Foster youth are less likely to graduate High School

- Foster youth experience higher suspension and expulsion rates

Discrepancy in Higher Education Outcomes for Foster Youth

- Over 70% of foster youth express a desire to attend college

- Only 20% of foster youth ever enroll in college compared to 60% of non-foster youth

- The majority of foster youth who enroll in college do not complete their degree

- Less than 10% of former foster youth obtain a bachelor's degree, compared with 24% of the general population

Why Higher Education Matters for Youth in Foster Care

- A four-year postsecondary degree = an average increase of $481,000 over the course of one's work life
- Any college attendance increases lifetime earnings by an average of $129,000
- Each additional year of education provides financial and non-financial benefits to youth and society
- Youth in foster care who have completed a post-secondary degree display greater gains in adult life circumstances than the general foster care population

What can we do to improve college access and success?

COLLEGE APPLICATION TIMELINE

FOR PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH WHO HAVE
EXPERIENCED THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

FALL OF JUNIOR YEAR

SEARCH FOR CAMPUS-BASED SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Many colleges and universities have campus support programs for students who have experienced foster care. These programs can offer help with things like admissions and financial aid applications, tuition waivers, college tours, community support services, counseling and advising, school supplies, workshops, housing, food, tutoring, or connections with other students in foster care. A directory of campus programs in Pennsylvania is available here.

In Pennsylvania, even schools without campus support programs have a Point of Contact for Foster Youth. View the directory here.

CONSIDER TAKING THE PSAT

The Preliminary SAT (PSAT) is a chance to practice and prepare for the SAT or ACT. Registration for the PSAT is through high schools. It is not required and does not count towards college admissions applications.

SPRING OF JUNIOR YEAR

MAKE A LIST OF COLLEGES

It may be a good idea to consider 3 to 5 schools, including at least one "reach" school and at least one school where there's a high chance of acceptance. Factors to keep in mind are where existing support systems are, the type of school (community, public, trade, or private), cost of the school, financial aid, size and location of the school, available majors/studies, campus-based support programs, what transportation is like there, or what types of support/resources are available.

CONSIDER TAKING THE SAT OR ACT

Colleges and universities may require the SAT or ACT standardized exam. Youth in foster care are eligible for SAT and ACT Fee Waivers, which include registration fees, application fees at participating colleges, study guides, and more. Counselors, social workers, or caseworkers can be contacted about the fee waiver. More information can also be found online.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

SEARCH FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Search online for scholarships from local and national organizations. Consider searching for scholarships specific to major, specific to any extracurricular interests, or specific to any identities. There is some national information on scholarships for foster youth here and here, and a Pennsylvania-specific guide here.

TALK WITH CASEWORKER

Caseworkers may assist in obtaining information about housing (consider whether housing will be provided by the foster care agency or what dormitory living will look like), gathering any necessary paperwork or documentation from the agency, and travel arrangements.

VISIT COLLEGES

Sign-ups for college admissions visits can be made through the campus-based support programs for foster youth or by calling the admissions office. Talk with your caseworker about transportation.

WRITE COLLEGE ESSAYS

Summer is a good time to begin college application essays, brainstorming or preparing scholarship application essays, and thinking about letters of recommendation.

Students can also create a Common App account to streamline applications to multiple colleges.

FALL OF SENIOR YEAR

OCT 1: FINANCIAL AID APPLICATIONS OPEN

Documentation can be received from the child welfare agency regarding foster care status via a court order or placement letter. Financial aid applications to apply to include:
- FAFSA
- Supplemental Financial Aid Applications for each college
- Collegeboard College Scholarship Services (CSS) Profile

NOV 1-15: EARLY DECISION APPLICATIONS DUE

For early-decision college applications, acceptance results are typically given by mid-December. These application deadlines range from early to mid-November.

SPRING OF SENIOR YEAR

JAN: COLLEGE AND FINANCIAL AID APPLICATIONS DUE

College application deadlines vary per college, though common due dates are Jan. 1, Jan. 5, and Jan 15. Many scholarship applications are due between January and April.

APR: APPLY FOR THE CHAFEE EDUCATIONAL AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV)
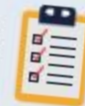
The Chafee ETV program provides vouchers of up to $5,000/year for youth in foster care attending higher education. Funds may be used for tuition, dorm fees, books, student loan repayments, and qualified living expenses. More information regarding your state's application process can be found online or through a caseworker.

The link to the PA Chafee grant is here. In PA, the same application is used for the Fostering Independence Through Education Tuition Waiver Program.

MAR/APR: REGULAR DECISION ACCEPTANCE RESULTS AND COMMITMENT

Once regular decision college applications are received, next steps include returning acceptance forms, completing any additional financial aid applications, and providing housing selections.

MAY/JUNE: SCHOLARSHIP ACCEPTANCE RESULTS

After committing to an institution, additional scholarships will help determine the final financial aid package.

Financing College for Foster Youth
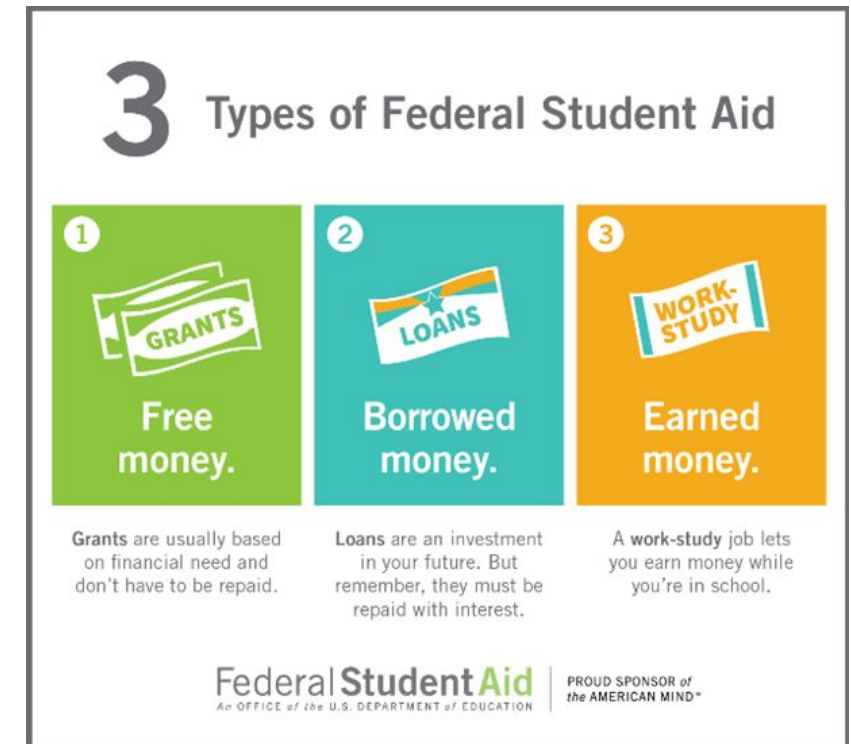
Students pay for college using

- Yesterday's money (savings)

- Today's money (work study, grants, scholarships)

- Tomorrow's money (loans)

Direct Costs   **Indirect Costs**

Tuition/Fees   Transportation

Room/Board   Personal Expenses

Books/Supplies   Dorm Furnishings

3 Types of Federal Student Aid

1. Free money. Grants are usually based on financial need and don't have to be repaid.

2. Borrowed money. Loans are an investment in your future. But remember, they must be repaid with interest.

3. Earned money. A work-study job lets you earn money while you're in school.

Federal Student Aid
An OFFICE of the U.S. DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION   PROUD SPONSOR of the AMERICAN MIND

Financing College for Foster Youth

Foster youth in Pennsylvania have access to four separate *grants* (money for college that does not need to be paid back)

1. Pell Grant (Federal)

2. Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant

3. Pennsylvania State Grant

4. Chafee Education and Training Grant

Deadlines, eligibility, participating schools and award amounts vary

Foster youth are vulnerable to take on insurmountable debt through excessive *loans*

Fostering Independence Through Education Act (FosterEd)

- New Law Passed in 2019, effected in 2020:
  - Created a **tuition and fee waiver** program at all Pennsylvania postsecondary educational institutions
  - Requires a coordinated effort to ensure that eligible students access existing available **state and federal grants** and state organizations provide outreach about the program
  - Requires all higher education institutions to establish a **single point of contact** for foster youth
  - **Evaluation** of retention rates of students who participate in the program

Fostering Independence Through Education Act (FosterEd)

Eligible Students must be:

- A resident of Pennsylvania

- Have not reached age 26 by July 1 of the academic year

- A recipient of a high school diploma

- Eligible for services under PA's John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood

- Identified as a youth in foster care or a youth discharged or adopted from foster care on or after attaining age 16

  - Or be a youth that has exited foster care on or after age 16 due to adoption or permanent legal guardianship

Fostering Independence Through Education Act (PHEAA)

Listen to the Experts

Can you tell us about your journey from high school to college?
Who was supporting and motivating you during that time in your life?

How was your transition to college?
What, if any, barriers did you face?

"Caregivers don't support my wants & needs"

"I felt very alone"

"My advocate helped; I didn't have family support."

"I didn't have a place to go during summer & breaks"

"There was no one to help on move-in day."

Promising Practice:
Campus Support Programs

"Campus Support Programs provide an array of financial, academic, social/emotional and logistical supports to help former foster youth stay in school and graduate." Dworsky, A., & Perez, A. (2010). Helping former foster youth graduate from college through campus support programs. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *32*(2), 255-263.

Youth formerly in foster care who participated in campus support programs experienced higher rates of college **retention** and **graduation** than those who had not participated in these programs

Dworsky, A., & Perez, A. (2009). Helping Former Foster Youth Graduate From College: Campus Support Programs in California and Washington State. *Chapin Hall Center for Children*.
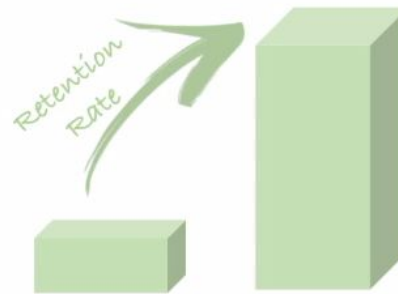
Promising Practice:
# Campus Support Programs

Components of a Campus Support Program may include:

- Scholarships
- Year-round housing
- Campus coaches
- Staff & peer mentoring
- Cultural and personal identity development
- Dorm and welcome supplies

- Multiple campus champions

Campus Directory of Resources

The Campus Programming Directory for Foster Youth is designed to assist students with experience in foster care and the many individuals who support them to make the best decisions about which college is the best fit.

- Programming information

- Contact information for Campus-Based Support Programs around the state

- Local resources available to youth in foster care

- Tips and other useful information
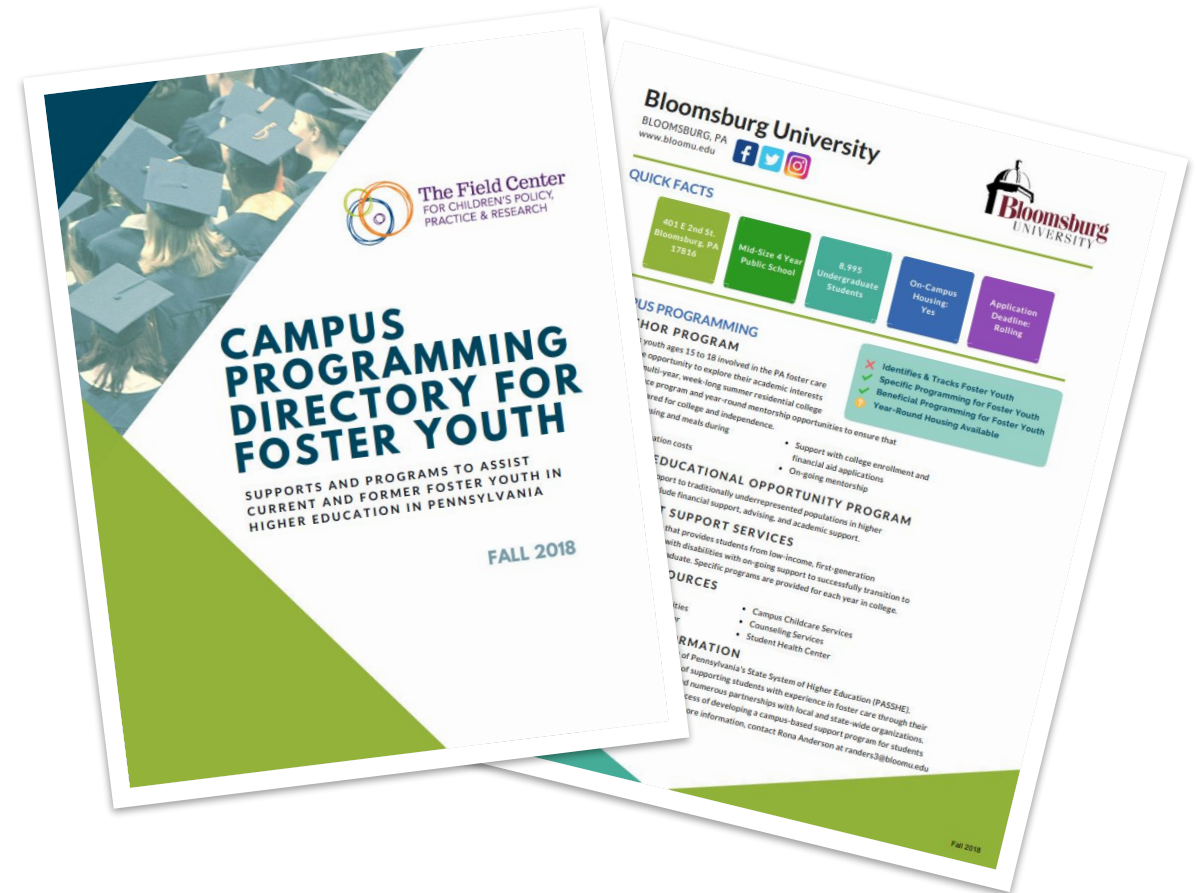
THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?

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