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 managing college life, such as financial aid, academic tutoring, and career services. Students interested in learning more about these programs should contact the financial aid office at the college of their choice.

In Pennsylvania, the directory of campus support programs in Pennsylvania is available here.

CONSIDER TAKING THE PSAT

The Preliminary SAT (PSAT) is a great way to prepare for the SAT or ACT. Registration for the PSAT is through high schools as part of the PSAT program. It is taken in October. PSAT results are released in December.

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 "likely" school with a high chance of acceptance. Factors to keep in mind are where the school is, type of school, size and location of the school, educational requirements, availability of financial aid, campus-based support programs, and what types of support services are available.

CONSIDER TAKING THE SAT OR ACT

Colleges and universities may require the SAT or ACT standardized exams. Most foster care are ACT standardized exams, which will be taken in the fall. Students interested in preparing for the SAT or ACT should contact the testing center at their school.

SUMMER BEFORE SENIOR YEAR

SEARCH FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Search 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.

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.

TALK WITH CASEWORKER

Case workers 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 for documentation from the agency, and travel arrangements.

VISIT COLLEGES

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

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.

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 Education Information Through Education, Tuition, and Voter Program.

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
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)

The Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program, created by Act 15 of 2015, seeks to remove barriers in accessing a postsecondary education for youth who are or have been in foster care. This will allow eligible foster youth to complete their studies, graduate with less debt, and have the opportunity to build a network of support.

The program is being administered collaboratively by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) in conjunction with the PA departments of Education, Human Services, and Labor & Industry.

Fostering Independence Tuition Waiver Program
Postsecondary Tuition Waivers for Eligible Foster Care Youth

How to Participate

1. Apply for funding at least 60 days before the start of the fall semester.
2. Complete the 2019-20 Application.
3. Submit updated FAFSA to PHEAA after filing.
4. Eligibility determination will be made at the postsecondary institution.

PHEAA Application Requirements

- 2019-20 Application
- 2019-20 FAFSA
- 2019-20 PHEAA Application

FAQs

What is the PHEAA Application Process?

1. Apply for funding at least 60 days before the start of the fall semester.
2. Complete the 2019-20 Application.
3. Submit updated FAFSA to PHEAA after filing.
4. Eligibility determination will be made at the postsecondary institution.

How do I apply for funding?

2. Submit updated FAFSA to PHEAA after filing.
3. Eligibility determination will be made at the postsecondary institution.

For additional information, visit PHEAA.org/FosterCare

The Field Center
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?

“I felt very alone”

“My advocate helped; I didn’t have family support.”

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

“I didn’t have a place to go during summer & breaks”

“Caregivers don’t support my wants & needs”
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.”

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.


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
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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