

Supporting Higher Education Access and Success for Youth with Experience in Foster Care in Pennsylvania: A Guide for Child Welfare and Education Professionals and Advocates

Purpose of the Guide

The importance of higher education and training to success in adulthood has become even more clear in our changing economy. **Higher education and training**¹ provide all young people opportunities for success and stability as they enter adulthood and launch themselves on their long-term career path. Higher education and training should be a realistic and achievable opportunity for youth in foster care to the same extent as their peers who did not grow up in the **child welfare system**. Yet, while large numbers of youth in foster care want to pursue higher education, only about 32% enroll in higher education,² and only 3-10% attain a bachelor's degree.³ In comparison, youth generally enroll in college at a rate of about 69%⁴ with about 32%⁵ completing their degrees. Youth in foster care have the talent, drive, and desire to pursue and succeed at higher education and training. What they often lack is the support, guidance, funds, and resources that most youth receive from their families to make higher education goals a reality.

This guide aims to provide information for advocates and supporters of youth in the child welfare system about how to leverage key resources available to youth with experience in foster care in Pennsylvania including the tuition waivers available through the Fostering Independence Through Education Program which goes into effect in Fall 2020. These resources and supports will also allow youth to have the best opportunity to attend and succeed in higher education and training if that is their goal. When equipped with information and excellent advocacy skills, advocates and supporters of youth in care can play a vital role in helping them access and succeed in higher education and training. Most youth rely on parents and family to navigate the college experience, make important decisions, and identify and access important resources. While all youth in foster care deserve family and permanency, we encourage child welfare, education, and other advocates to play a role in helping youth in foster care navigate their path through higher education.

The purpose of this guide is to alert advocates and supporters of youth in the child welfare system to some of the key benefits and resources that are either targeted at youth in foster care or are resources they are likely eligible for to support their higher education pursuits.

¹ A glossary of key words is available at the end of the guide.

² See MARK E. COURTNEY ET AL., CHAPIN HALL U. CHI., MIDWEST EVALUATION OF THE ADULT FUNCTIONING OF FORMER FOSTER YOUTH: OUTCOMES AT AGE 23 AND 24, at 22 (2010).

³ See *id.*; PETER J. PECORA ET AL., CASEY FAM. PROGRAMS, ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF FOSTER CARE: EARLY RESULTS FROM THE CASEY NATIONAL ALUMNI STUDY 28 (2003).

⁴ For 2018 data, see U.S. BUREAU LAB. STATS., NAT. CTR. EDUC. STATS., COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND WORK ACTIVITY OF RECENT HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE GRADUATES SUMMARY, (Apr. 25, 2019), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgcec.nr0.htm>, and for 1993-2016 data, see U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, 69.7 PERCENT OF 2016 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES ENROLLED IN COLLEGE IN OCTOBER 2016 (May 22, 2017), <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2017/69-point-7-percent-of-2016-high-school-graduates-enrolled-in-college-in-october-2016.htm>.

⁵ See CAMILLE L. RYAN & KURT BAUMAN, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: 2015, at 2 (Mar. 29, 2016), <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p20-578.pdf>.

The guide includes the following parts:

- **Part 1: Important Resources and Supports from the Child Welfare System**
 - Supports and benefit that youth are eligible for through the child welfare system
 - Supports and benefits that youth are eligible for after leaving the foster care system but based on their former foster care status
- **Part 2: College Based Support Programs**
 - Campus based supports targeted at youth with experience in foster care
 - Campus based supports open to all students that could benefit youth in foster care
- **Part 3: Funding Higher Education and Training**
 - Financial assistance for higher education and training that youth are eligible for based on their experience in foster care.
 - Financial assistance for higher education and training that youth with experience in foster care may access
- **Part 4 Support Services in the Community**
 - Community based resources that could benefit youth with experience in foster care as they pursue higher education and training

This guide is not intended be the main source of information for helping youth navigate the higher education and financial aid world. There are many excellent general resources for that purpose.⁶ This guide focuses specifically on resources that are especially useful to youth with experience in foster care.

Additionally, we recognize that higher education access and success requires youth to receive educational support throughout their middle and high school years in order to take advantage of postsecondary college opportunities. We encourage advocates to provide these robust educational supports⁷ to youth throughout their early educational experiences, but those supports will not be the focus of this guide.

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⁶ Examples of helpful, more general guides or resources include: Step Up to College: <https://philadelphiafutures.org/step-up-to-college/> (a Philadelphia-focused guide with helpful information for all students and information on Philadelphia Futures, a program dedicated to providing services for low-income, first-generation Philadelphia students); I Want to Go To College: Now What?: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/want-to-go-to-college.pdf> (the U.S. Department of Education's 2018 college guide); College Board, Create Your Road Map Tool: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/> (a tool to help with college planning); College Navigator: <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> (the U.S. Department of Education's college-planning tool); Unigo Scholarship Resources: <https://www.unigo.com/> (a website connecting students to scholarships).

⁷ A great place to start to get help with advocacy for a youth who is in middle or high school are the Foster Care Points of Contact through the school system and education liaisons at the children welfare agency. You can find more information about these contact people here: <https://directory.center-school.org/fostercare>.