

Part 2: College Based Support Programs

Introduction: Most colleges and universities have campus-based support programs and services that help enrolled students address any challenges they may face. These programs can help youth succeed and can be especially valuable for youth who are not connected to family who can provide significant support. Some of these programs are specifically targeted at youth who are or have been in foster care, while many are available to all students, or students meeting certain eligibility criteria such as financial need or having a disability. Most youth who are or were in foster care will be eligible for many of these programs. Helping youth identify these programs and enroll in them as soon as possible will help them build a network of support that will aid in their success in higher education and training. **This section covers campus-based support programs that target youth with experience in foster care and general campus-based support programs. It also covers higher education points of contact (POC) for youth with experience in foster care.**

What are campus-based support programs targeted at youth with experience in foster care?

Many colleges and universities have developed campus support programs to address the unique higher education needs of young people in the foster care system. These programs provide resources and staff support to help young people with experience in foster care who may not be receiving assistance from their parents or other guardians after they enter college. Staff at these programs have knowledge of the foster care system and the challenges that youth in care face. The programs provide an array of support, which often include counseling and advising, workshops, school supplies, food, tutoring, and peer support.

Pennsylvania colleges and universities with campus support programs for youth in foster care include:

Bloomsburg University, Cabrini College, California University of Pennsylvania, Chestnut Hill College, Community College of Allegheny County—South Campus, Community College of Philadelphia, East Stroudsburg University, Keystone College, Kutztown University, Lackawanna College, Manor College, Montgomery County Community College, Penn State Abington, Penn State Greater Allegheny, Penn State Main Campus, Temple University, West Chester University, and Westmoreland Community College.

The Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice and Research has also created a directory of support services available to young people with experience in foster care in colleges and universities throughout Pennsylvania. The directory is available here: <https://fieldcenteratpenn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-DIRECTORY.pdf>.

Who is eligible for campus support programs and how do youth enroll?

Youth with experience in foster care should contact the support program at colleges and universities they are interested in or attending and directly ask if there is an application. Use the Field Center Guide mentioned above to find the contact information for each program.

What are Points of Contacts for Youth with Experience in Foster Care?

Pennsylvania’s Fostering Independence Through Education program requires Pennsylvania colleges and universities to designate Points of Contact (POC) at their schools for youth who are or have been in foster care.²⁵ The POC helps students with admissions and financial aid applications, tuition waiver applications;

²⁵ See 24 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 26-2604-K (West 2019).

provides information about on-campus and community support services and resources; and serves as a general resource for students who have foster care experience.

How do you find the Point of Contacts?

The POC will be listed on all college and university websites.²⁶ A directory of POCs at many, although not all Pennsylvania colleges, can also be found here: <https://directory.center-school.org/fostercare/highereducation/search>. Youth should reach out to the POC at the schools of interest and ask for assistance with the application process and learn about available financial aid and services. As soon as the youth gets accepted and decides to attend a school in Pennsylvania, they should contact the school's POC.

The requirement that schools designate POCs was effective in August of 2019.²⁷ This means that POCs should be available to assist students youth before the Fostering Independence Through Education Tuition Waiver program begins.

What are general campus-based student support programs or services?

In addition to programs directly geared towards young people with experience in the foster care system, there are several other programs and university offices that can provide additional resources that may be helpful to young people in the foster care system so that they flourish and feel supported in higher education and training. Youth should be connected with the major types of college support programs and offices listed below. Help youth learn about these programs and connect with them.

Campus Academic Support Services

What are Academic Support Services?

Almost all schools have Academic Support Services, which provide tutoring, academic workshops, and study skills support for all students.

Services provided may include academic advising, tutoring, exam and course-review sections, study strategies and time-management workshops, and foreign-language practice labs. Schools may also provide specific programs to help students with their writing and public speaking skills. Academic Support Services offices often also include computer labs. Schools may have one centralized office that provides all Academic Support Services, or they may be offered by several different offices or departments.

How do students access Academic Support Services?

Most students will be eligible for these services and just need to ask or apply to receive them. University websites can be a good initial resource for students to learn about the various Academic Support Services that are offered by the university. Academic advisors and college professors may also be good resources to learn more about Academic Support Services.

ACT 101 Programs

What are Act 101 Programs?

²⁶ See 24 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 26-2604-K(6) (West 2019).

²⁷ See 24 PA. STAT. AND CONS. STAT. ANN. § 26-2604-K (West 2019).

The Pennsylvania Higher Education Equal Opportunity Act of 1971, known as “Act 101”²⁸ was enacted to support the higher education aspirations of students who have experienced economic and educational disadvantages and may otherwise not have the opportunity to pursue and succeed at higher education. Act 101 Programs provide students the academic and other support to help them complete their higher education program. Act 101 programs provide many different services, including tutoring, mentoring, academic check-ins, and career counseling among others

Who is eligible for Act 101 Programs?

Students must check the application and eligibility process at the schools that have Act 101 Programs, but generally students are eligible if they have low or very little income and have challenges related to their academic achievement (grades, GPA, SATs, ACTs).²⁹ Most youth who have been in foster care will meet the income requirements and will just need to qualify based on grades or test scores.

How do you find out if the post-secondary program has an Act 101 Program?

A list of colleges and universities that have Act 101 program can be found here:

<https://www.pheaa.org/documents/sgsp/ph/act-101-directory.pdf>.

How and when should students apply for Act 101 Programs?

Students should apply for the Act 101 Program as soon as they are accepted to the school. Most schools will have the application on their website. The program may fill up so it is a good to apply as soon as possible. The university’s POC can also help students learn more about the Act 101 Program and its resources.

TRIO PROGRAMS—Student Support Services

What are Student Support Services-TRIO Programs?

The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to help them enter and complete higher education and training. TRIO programs are required to reach out to youth who are in foster care or have experience in foster care. TRIO includes eight programs. One of the eight programs is student support services³⁰ and these programs can be found at some higher education programs in PA and across the country. These programs aim to get students successfully through college by providing academic advising, skills-building workshops, leadership training, and academic tutoring and social activities. Some also provide resources and aid to students.

What schools in PA provide TRIO Student Support Services?

A list of colleges and universities that have TRIO programs can be found here: <http://www.patrio.org/sss>.

Who is eligible for TRIO Student Support Services and how do students enroll?

Youth are eligible if they are low-income students who are first-generation college students and students with disabilities who need academic support. Youth who are or were in foster care will be income eligible for TRIO student support programs. They should apply to the program as soon as they are accepted to the post-

²⁸ See 22 PA. CODE §§ 44.1 (2000) *et seq.*

²⁹ See 22 PA. CODE §44.4 (2000) (establishing the criteria for Eligible Students).

³⁰ See 20 U.S.C.A. § 1070a-14 (West 2010).

secondary education program. Each college or university will have an application process to access TRIO Student Support Services.

Office of Disabilities

What are offices of disabilities?

Offices of disabilities are at all colleges, universities and training programs to support students who have disabilities and enforce federal and state laws that prohibit disability discrimination.³¹ When youth leave high school and enter higher education and training, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act no longer applies. This means that a youth **will not** have special education services or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in college.

Instead, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973³² and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)³³ are the federal laws that require that higher education institutions provide **reasonable accommodations** to students so that they have equal access to all higher education opportunities. The office of disabilities is the main point of contact to ensure that the law is followed and that eligible students are supported.

What reasonable accommodations and support can students get through the office of disabilities?

Although students in higher education programs do not get an IEP, and high school IEPs will not transfer to college, students with disabilities may be eligible for some supports through an **accommodations plan**. Their high school IEP can provide helpful information to design the accommodations they will need in college. Examples of accommodations include receiving notes from class lectures, permission to make audio recordings in class or use a laptop, preferential seating, and having longer time to take exams, or taking them in a distraction reduced room. Accommodations may also help youth outside of the classroom such as special housing arrangements. The office of disabilities may be able to provide other additional services or supports to the youth in addition to accommodations to help the youth gather as much information as possible about what is available.

How do youth get accommodations?

Youth must contact the office of disabilities and ask for accommodations. This should be done as soon as a youth is accepted into a school so accommodations or services can be arranged for and begin as soon as the youth arrives on campus. Unlike special education in grade and high school, higher education institutions have no obligation to identify students with disabilities and ask if they want support. **Students must ask to be identified and to receive accommodations through a 504 or accommodations plan.** Students may have to fill out an application or other forms regarding their disability. Students will also need to provide documentation of their disability to their school. The office of disability will be able to inform students of what documentation is necessary. Necessary documentation may include evaluations or reports from school or a treatment provider. Advocates should help youth gather documentation of disability and any impairments that show the need for accommodations and ensure that they meet with treatment providers as soon as possible if such documentation is not available. Securing these documents will be more difficult once a youth begins college.

³¹ The name of the office might not have the word “disability” in it. It may be called the office of “access” “equity,” or “accommodations.”

³² 29 U.S.C.A. § 794 (West 2016).

³³ 42 U.S.C.A. § 12101 (West 2008) *et seq.*

Note that being identified as eligible for accommodations by the office of disabilities does not mean this information will be released to others. If a youth is eligible for accommodations, only people involved in making the accommodations will be aware, and the youth's disability status will still be confidential. Sometimes youth are reluctant to identify themselves because they think other people will have access to that information. Their confidentiality will be respected and sharing this information is just for the purposes of being found eligible for services and providing supports.

Developing an Accommodations Plan

1. Before students with an IEP graduate, they should be provided what is called a Summary of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (SAAFP). More information available here: https://www.pattan.net/getmedia/7f8bd32f-8a64-49e6-8b23-0aeeda04cd9/SoP-ANN070108_2. This will include useful information to help design an accommodations plan.
2. A youth may have an accommodations plan in high school. The information in this plan can be used to advocate for the development of an accommodations plan for college.
3. Use case planning meetings prior to a youth beginning post-secondary education to talk about what accommodations will support the youth's progress and success.

What if a youth was not identified for special education services, but does have a disability and needs additional supports in post-secondary programs?

Because of placement moves and the general instability of foster care, some young people may not have been identified as having a special need or disability even if they actually have one. If you are working with a youth and have concerns that there are needs that should be identified and addressed, help them get connected with treatment providers who can complete an assessment and evaluations and recommend appropriate treatment and supports. This information can help you work with a youth to select the right post-secondary path and provide documentation when you advocate for accommodations.

Affinity Groups

What are affinity groups?

Affinity groups are formed around a shared identity or interest. College campuses may have a variety of affinity groups for students that share ethnic, cultural or racial identities, LGBTQ students, women, international students, etc. Affinity groups can be formed as student organizations or may even have their own campus office. Student affinity organizations and campus offices can help provide valuable social supports to students. They can bring together students who share common interests and identities and put on relevant social and educational programming. Affinity groups that have their own campus offices or centers can provide studying and socializing spaces for students, technology resources, and other supports. Some affinity groups may also have housing for program participants.

How do students get involved in affinity groups?

Affinity groups and related campus offices are generally welcoming to all students. Students may get involved by attending events or meetings hosted by such groups or visiting an affinity group office to learn more information about the services they provide. Many groups will have their own websites or social media accounts that students can follow to keep up to date with upcoming events and available resources.

TIPS TO MAXIMIZE ASSISTANCE FROM CAMPUS SUPPORT PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN HIGER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Help students explore the campus support programs and services available at various Pennsylvania colleges.
- As students decide what school to attend, make sure they consider the support services that are provided on campus as part of their decision.
- Help students identify the POC at the college or university the student attends.
- Encourage and help youth contact their POC so they start to establish a relationship.
- Have students sign a release form that authorizes the POC to speak to you if you want to be involved and receive information about the youth.
- Review the deadlines and application procedures for ACT 101 and TRIO Student Support Services programs with students and assist them with any required applications.
- If the student has a disability or special need, help them request accommodations. Help them collect any documentation they need to be found eligible or help them see treatment providers who can provide this information,
- Help students enroll and use all students support services that are offered on campus! As you continue to check in with youth over time, remind them of these resources and supports and encourage them to take advantage of them.
- Explore what affinity groups are available at schools a young person is interested in; encourage them to get involved in such organizations.