

CHAPTER

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CHAPTER 13

Transitioning Out of Foster Care & Post-Secondary Education Opportunities

Transitioning Out of Foster Care:

There are supports and services available to help students in foster care prepare for adulthood and transition out of foster care. Linking students with these resources, although not a requirement, is beneficial to ensure students and caregivers are informed and able to take advantage of these opportunities. This section provides a high-level overview and brief description of programs and services available. Contact DFPS regional offices and local service providers for more information.



To learn more about the experience of students in foster care and the impact of transition from a youth's perspective, see these audio and video links:

➔ **Aging Out: What happens when you've grown up in foster care and suddenly you're on your own?** www.elocallink.tv/vp2/vp3_show.php?cid=703&movie=jimcasey1

➔ **For more audio and videos go to the DFPS Texas Youth Connection website:** www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/fun_stuff/stories.asp

TRANSITIONAL SERVICES DESCRIBED:

Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Services: Help youth ages 16 and older prepare for adulthood and exit foster care. Independent living skills and case management services are provided to eligible youth up to age 21. Youth should be referred to regional DFPS PAL staff for more information. www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Preparation_For_Adult_Living/default.asp

Transition Centers: Are “one-stop shops” and a central place for youth from 15 ½ to 25 years to access resources, services, and information. They are located throughout Texas. Visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/resources/local/default.asp#center for a current list of Transition Centers.

Circles of Support (COS): Begins when a student is 16 years old in preparation for adulthood and life after foster care. COS meetings allow youth to meet with supportive and caring adults to discuss the youth's goals and future plans. The youth may invite teachers, school counselors, parents, siblings, foster care providers, and mentors to attend the Circle of Support meeting. Education-related supports and resources are an important element for discussion in preparation for exiting foster care. www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/circles_of_support.asp

Extended Foster Care: Allows students enrolled in an education or career training program (who are eligible) to extend their stay in foster care (up to the age of 22 to complete high school, or up to age 21 to complete college or vocational/technical training). www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Fostering_Connections/extended_fostercare.asp

DFPS Transitional Living Services:

www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/default.asp

HOW CAN SCHOOL PERSONNEL ASSIST STUDENTS PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD AND TRANSITIONING OUT OF FOSTER CARE?

Listed below are important documents for students to have as they prepare for independence. School personnel who work with students on independent living and post-high school planning can specifically encourage students in foster care by being informed of the following provisions:

Insurance: All children and youth in the conservatorship of DFPS are enrolled in STAR Health, a Medicaid program. This program provides continuous medical coverage to youth ages 18 to 21 who have aged out of traditional foster care at age 18 and remain in extended foster care to complete high school requirements, pursue post-secondary education or vocational and technical training opportunities, or remain in foster care due to medical reasons. Remind students to update their STAR Health coverage with address changes upon leaving foster care for continuing benefits. For more information, visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/health/default.asp#consent.

Driver's License: As of May 2012, students in temporary or permanent conservatorship, and those 18–20 living in a DFPS paid foster care placement, are eligible for waived driver's license fees. Encourage students to contact their primary caseworker or Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) worker to take advantage of this opportunity. www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/DPS_License_Facts.pdf

Make Sure Youth Have Obtained Certified Copies of Birth Certificate, Social Security Card, and a Personal I.D. Card:

Card: On or before turning 16, youth should receive certified copies of these documents. School personnel can follow up with students to make sure they have received copies of this important paperwork.

Documents students should receive or have no later than 30 days before exiting foster care: School personnel who work with older youth can follow up with students to make sure they have received copies (or the original, if appropriate) of:

- ⇒ Birth certificate;
- ⇒ Social security card;
- ⇒ Personal identification (ID) card;
- ⇒ Immunization records;
- ⇒ Information contained in youth's Health Passport;
- ⇒ Proof of enrollment in Medicaid, if appropriate; and
- ⇒ Any existing Medical Power of Attorney regarding the youth.





RESOURCES: Preparing for Adulthood & Transitioning Out of Foster Care

DFPS, “Access Granted — Texas Foster Care Handbook for Youth” — *is a youth-friendly guide that provides a general overview of the foster care system and guidance on resources and supports for youth available in Texas. Making this type of information available in school counseling centers is important for increasing awareness and supporting the unique needs of students in foster care.*

https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Documents/Child_Protection/pdf/foster-care-handbook.pdf

(English version)

www.dfps.state.tx.us/documents/Child_Protection/pdf/foster-care-handbook-sp.pdf

(Spanish version).

DFPS, Texas Youth Connection website: www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/default.asp

“Like” the DFPS Youth Connection Facebook page to receive updates and information:

www.facebook.com/texasyouthconnection

DFPS Transitional Living Services website:

www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Transitional_Living/default.asp

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project, “A Guide for Those “Aging Out” of Foster Care in Texas”:

www.texasfosteryouth.org/downloads/agingout2012.pdf

Texas Foster Youth Justice Project website: www.texasfosteryouth.org/

Post-Secondary Education Opportunities:

There are many financial resources and college campus supports available to help young people from foster care access and succeed in higher education. Some college campuses in Texas have specific support programs for alumni of the foster care system. School personnel play an important role in informing students of these resources and linking them to higher education and post-secondary opportunities. Connecting students with opportunities and helping to facilitate successful transitions from high school to college is an important step school personnel can take in assisting students.



LAW: State law requires that all students in grades 11 or 12 in substitute care are provided information about the tuition and fee waiver, dual credit, or other courses where a student may earn joint high school and college credit.¹⁶⁷



TIP: District liaisons are encouraged to link with local colleges and campus-based support programs to develop connections and facilitate effective transitions into post-secondary for students in foster care.

WHAT FINANCIAL SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE TO HELP STUDENTS FROM FOSTER CARE PAY FOR COLLEGE?

College Tuition and Fee Waiver:¹⁶⁸ Some individuals formerly in Texas’ foster care system qualify for a lifetime tuition and fees waiver at any Texas state-supported institution of higher education, as long as a student enrolls in at least one college credit before turning 25.

Youth are eligible to have college tuition and fees waived at Texas state-supported colleges or universities, public medical schools, public dental schools, public junior colleges, and public technical institutes (as defined by Texas Education Code §61.003, §54.001, and §54.002). This refers to a youth who:



- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before his or her 18th birthday;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS on the day he or she graduated from high school or received his or her GED;
- Is in the conservatorship of DFPS and in high school and who takes a dual credit course, or other course for which a high school student may earn joint high school and college credit;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS on or after his or her 14th birthday, if the youth was also eligible for adoption on or after that day;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before he or she was adopted, if the adoption occurred on or after September 1, 2009;
- Was in the conservatorship of DFPS the day before permanent managing conservatorship was given to an individual who is not the child's parent, if permanent managing conservatorship (PMC) was given to the individual on or after September 1, 2009; or
- Has an adoption assistance agreement with DFPS that provided both monthly payments and medical assistance.

A youth or child must have been in DFPS conservatorship before an adoption or PMC was granted to be eligible for the college tuition and fee waiver.

Note: The tuition and fee waiver is verified in the form of a letter from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

Education & Training Voucher (ETV) Program: A federally funded and state administered program for youth in foster care or those adopted from DFPS after turning age 16, it is available to youth starting at age 16 up to the age of 23. Expenses like books, transportation, and other school-related costs are covered through ETV. Students may be eligible to receive up to \$5,000 in financial assistance per year to support them in reaching their post-secondary education goals. Visit the link provided for more information and eligibility requirements:

www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Protection/Youth_and_Young_Adults/Post_Secondary_Education/default.asp

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA): It is important that students applying for college fill out their FAFSA accurately to qualify for the maximum number of scholarships and financial resources available. There are specific questions which ask prospective students to identify themselves as having been in foster care. Former foster youth qualify for the greatest amount of need-based financial aid available. School staff, district liaisons, and other partners can help students receive these benefits by assisting students as they complete their FAFSA applications. It is also important for the student to be aware of his or her responsibility to maintain the required Grade Point Average (GPA) and course completion rate in order to maintain financial aid. There are financial penalties for students who do not complete their courses within the semester.

CONSIDERATIONS TO HELP STUDENTS ACTIVATE COLLEGE LIFETIME TUITION AND FEES WAIVER WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL



Best practices include coordination among high school personnel, college support services, and college faculty to ensure students receive the support necessary for a positive academic experience and a successful college experience. **School personnel can play a key role in linking students with college campus supports and services and encouraging students to believe college is possible!**

Building success and confidence is important for all students in their initial college experience. It is especially helpful for school personnel to assist students in activating their tuition and fees waivers while they are attending high school. Regardless of a student's current academic achievement, access to opportunities to activate the tuition and fees waiver and participate in college-related coursework and activities impacts college readiness and future college access. Linking students to college course opportunities, including developmental courses, gives students the benefit of engaging in the college environment with the emotional and academic supports provided through the high school and child welfare system (school counselor, stable placement, CASA, PAL, etc).

Additionally, students from foster care may return to college in later years and Texas' *lifetime* tuition and fees waiver is the only foster youth-specific financial resource that does not expire once it is activated. When in the student's best interest, helping students to activate the college tuition and fees waiver is encouraged. District foster care liaisons and school personnel can advance coordination with local college campuses to support post-secondary transitions for students in foster care.

TIPS: Texas Lifetime Tuition and Fees Waiver



- ⇒ The tuition and fees waiver is activated regardless of whether a student completes a course.
- ⇒ Contact the student's caseworker to make sure that the tuition and fee waiver is generated.
- ⇒ The tuition and fees waiver is generated in hard-copy form by a letter from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Requesting multiple copies of the letter, and storing a copy for a student in the event the waiver becomes lost or stolen, may help expedite college enrollment.
- ⇒ In the event a new copy of the tuition fees waiver is needed, contact the Regional DFPS office, Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, where the youth is from or the state DFPS office.
- ⇒ Students must present a hard-copy of the tuition fees waiver letter when enrolling at a public Texas higher education institution. Colleges and universities vary in how they process the waiver. Communicate with each college individually to determine their methods for applying the waiver and which department will accept and store the document.
- ⇒ Even when dual credit courses are available at no cost to students, high schools can help the youth access the waiver and have the DFPS verification letter ready to submit to colleges. This is important so that the tuition and fees waiver can be set up, activated, and ready for the student to use following high school graduation.

WHAT COLLEGE SUPPORT NETWORKS AND COLLEGE CAMPUS PROGRAMS EXIST IN TEXAS FOR STUDENTS FORMERLY IN FOSTER CARE?

Texas Reach is a statewide network focused on increasing college access and retention for foster care alumni. Texas Reach works with colleges and universities statewide in establishing and promoting best-practices in higher education for students formerly in foster care. College campus-based supports for foster care alumni are continuously expanding throughout Texas.

Visit the Texas Reach website to learn more about their annual conference, college access, and other resources available for students in foster care. Join the Texas Reach Google Group listserv to stay informed of new resources, conference updates, and information related to college readiness: www.texasreach.org/

Many college campus programs exist:

Visit Texas Reach for a comprehensive list of college programs and more information: www.texasreach.org/colleges--universities.html

Some of Texas' longest running programs are listed:

Austin Community College — Austin Foster Care Alumni Program:
www.austincc.edu/fca/

Texas State University (TSU) — San Marcos — (FACES) Foster Care Alumni Creating Educational Success:
www.vpsa.txstate.edu/programs-and-services/Foster-Care-Alumni.html

Sam Houston State University — Houston Forward Program — Moving Foster Youth Forward:
www.shsu.edu/~forward/

Texas Tech University (TTU) — Lubbock: Pegasus Program — First Generation Program & “Hope Chest” for foster youth who are graduating seniors within the Lubbock area.
www.depts.ttu.edu/diversity/pegasus/PEGASUS_service_projects.php

DO STUDENTS NEED A BACTERIAL MENINGITIS VACCINATION IN ORDER TO ENTER COLLEGE?

Yes. This is also called the meningococcal vaccine. All Texas college or university students cannot start classes until they show documentation that their vaccination or booster dose is current. Vaccinations are good for five years and must be done, at the latest, 10 days before the start of classes. It is helpful to communicate this information to students and caregivers and help connect them with the appropriate resources to satisfy this college entrance requirement. Students in foster care receive free medical coverage through STAR Health. Visit www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/health/default.asp#consent for more information.

More information about the law can be found at the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website: www.theccb.state.tx.us/index.cfm?objectid=A641CD0D-E56A-A36A-1BCB39FF80781178



RESOURCES: Planning for Post-Secondary Education

“DFPS Higher Education Services/Information for Current and Former Foster Youth, Adopted Youth, and youth in PCA/PMC” — *an informative DFPS brief describing college financial resources available for Texas students in foster care:* www.utdanacenter.org/theo/downloads/factsheets/FosterCareEdChart.pdf

For more information about financial resources available for students in foster care, visit the DFPS Youth Connection website: www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/education/financial.asp

Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, “Post-Secondary Education Resources for Youth in and Transitioning Out of the Child Welfare System” — *provides information on filing the FAFSA and a step-by-step checklist for accessing financial resources available for students in foster care:* www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/center_on_children_and_the_law/education/q_a_higher_ed.authcheckdam.pdf

Casey Family Programs, “It’s My Life: Post-Secondary Education and Training” — *a resource guide that may be downloaded or ordered, in hard copy, for free on Casey Family Programs website, including beneficial education information, academic checklists, resources, and tools to support students in foster care into post-secondary education:* www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/ItsMyLife_PostsecondaryEducation.pdf

Casey Family Programs, “It’s My Life: Financial Aid” — *helpful information and practice tips to help students access financial aid for college:* www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/ItsMyLife_PostsecondaryEducation_FinancialAid.pdf

Casey Family Programs, “Providing Effective Financial Aid Assistance to Students from Foster Care and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth: A Key to Higher Education Access and Success” — *for more information on assisting students in foster care on how to accurately file their FAFSA:* casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/ProvidingEffectiveFinancialAid.pdf

Dual Credit FAQ: www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=4697&menu_id=814

College for All Texans: www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/financialaid/tofa2.cfm?ID=429

Own Your Own Future: www.ownyourownfuture.com/

Texas Gear Up: www.texasgearup.com/

Educational Resources — Build Your Toolkit: www.texasgearup.com/byot/category/

